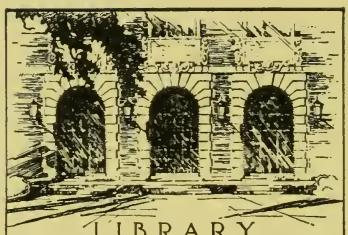

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UNITED.

A Novel.

BY

A. P. SINNETT,

AUTHOR OF

"KARMA," "ESOTERIC BUDDHISM," "THE OCCULT WORLD,"

ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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UNITED.

CHAPTER I.

FACTS RECOGNISED.

Edith lay quite quietly for some five or ten minutes longer; and occasionally Marston spoke to her, asking some insignificant question, whether she was comfortable, contented, or happy, to keep touch with her entranced faculties. Then at last she murmured sadly, "Oh, I don't want to! No, not yet," and so on, which Marston took to be the sign he awaited, though the form of the language had the opposite meaning.

"But you must come back, you know, all the same. You won't be cross with me if I pull gently at the thread now, will you?"

"Yes I shall be," she replied emphatically;

but, as before, with protests and petulant reproaches, she nevertheless came to herself in a minute or two—sinking for a few moments into total unconsciousness, and suddenly waking out of this—broad-awake, without a trace of drowsiness—sitting up, her bright eyes sparkling, and her senses alive this time to the situation, before she asked any questions.

"I remember her this time," she said. "Stop, don't say a word any of you. I've seen my Queen," she said earnestly to Marston, "and I can describe her to you; at least, I remember her vividly. What a wonderful face it is—so beautiful, so sweet, and yet so exalted in expression."

Edith's own look, as she spoke in her eagerness and enthusiasm, seemed so closely to correspond to her own words, that Marston answered, "I can well believe it," though she herself was far too excited to think of any double significance in what he said.

"Did you see her distinctly?" Mrs. Malcolm asked. "There was no veil or anything to hide her from you?"

Edith declared at first—no; that there had

been nothing of the kind in the way; but, coming down to details, found herself less able than she had expected to give an exact description. She could not identify her own attitude while with the Spirit. Had she embraced her; had she knelt in adoration; had she been touched or embraced by the Spirit?—she could hardly say. She had the sense of having nestled up against her, certainly; but she could not say whether she had been standing up or sitting down. Above all, she was quite unable to say how she herself had looked when on the spiritual plane. Had she been dressed as she then was, or in vague white drapery, like that she associated with her mental picture of her Spirit Queen? She could not say. She did not remember to have seen herself once during her flight.

"But I remember my guide and companion, Zephyr," she said, even his name, which she remembered to have asked him. Had she asked him for that of her own motion, or had she done so at Mr. Marston's instigation? She thought she had done it at her own impulse. She did not remember

being guided to do anything by Mr. Marston.

"And yet I know something was said about you," she said, turning to him with a look of inquiry. "What was it now?" she pondered and tried to recall the lost idea. "I believe something nice was said about you; but I cannot recollect exactly."

Then, after they had been talking in this way for some time, she noticed that Mrs. Malcolm and Mr. Ferrars both looked agitated.

"What is the matter? Have I said anything—I don't remember—that affects you?"

Both persons addressed felt that Edith was, in a measure, in Mr. Marston's hands, and did not like to refer to the earlier part of her trance without his permission. Both looked at him, and neither replied.

"I see no reason for reserve as regards Miss Kinseyle," he said.

Ferrars was too eager to discuss the matter to be kept back any longer.

"Then, for heaven's sake!" he answered impetuously, "let us talk freely. What does

it mean? Is it conceivable that this astounding story is really true?"

"My dear George," said Mrs. Malcolm, "it would be madness to disregard it! We must sound it to the bottom."

"But what on earth is the matter?" asked Edith.

Marston gave her an account of what she had said.

"Your wonderful gifts," he explained, "were employed on another matter before you saw the Spirit Queen. We asked you to elucidate what you had seen at Oatfield, about Count Garciola, and you did so with the most splendid perfection. You have told us——" then he went on to sum up the story.

"And I told you all that, with her name and everything. How extraordinary!"

"The precision of the details was extraordinary. You hardly realize as yet the exquisite quality of your own higher senses."

"But what is to be done?" interrupted Ferrars. "It is quite frightful to think of the precipice that—that Terra is approaching, if this be really so. How much time is

there to make use of? Do you know when they are to be married?" he asked of Edith.

"Not till her father comes from India. At first it had been arranged for earlier than that; but quite lately there came a telegram from him saying he would come home at once for the wedding, and declaring that it must not take place till he got back."

"That is a respite for her, at any rate. It must be postponed for another three weeks or more. Marian," he said, after moving up and down the room for a while, and crushing the others into silence by the vehemence of his agitation, "there is no middle course to take, between two, that I can see. One is to suppose that all we have heard is mere hallucination, that we must all forget and never think of again; and the other is—for me to go to Seville."

"I never supposed for a moment, George," said Mrs. Malcolm calmly, "that you would do anything else."

"Enough; I will go to-morrow. I was longing to ask further questions, but——"

"Why didn't you?" said Edith. "Could I have told more if I had been asked?" she inquired, turning to Marston.

"My dear George," said Mrs. Malcolm, "Sidney did as much as was possible, I am sure. I admired the firmness with which he held Edith to the point till the essential information was obtained, though it was torture for him to resist her entreaties, I am sure."

Edith looked from Mrs. Malcolm to Marston with a grateful but still inquiring smile.

"Was I so very rebellious? Why did you not make me remember that part, as a warning to behave better another time?"

"Perhaps your memory would not have carried too much, and it was better for you to remember the pleasantest of your visions, was it not? It was so important to get a clue to the whereabouts of the woman, that I ventured to be obstinate in insisting on that, even though it seemed distressing to you for the time. But I should not like to have put more than a little strain upon your inclinations. The soul of a sensitive is too mar-

vellously delicate an instrument to be handled except with the most tender respect."

"Of course — of course," said Ferrars. "Pray don't think I am complaining. With what has been said I ought to be able to find the woman, if such a woman really exists."

He went on to discuss with Mrs. Malcolm the various circumstances under which it might be supposed that Count Garciola could have originally married a woman now living in a shop under another name.

Meanwhile Edith lay back in her corner, and Marston still sat in the chair near, neither speaking, but still under the influence of the peculiar relationship that had subsisted between them during the trance. Eventually, when there was a pause in the conversation of the other two, Edith said :

"Now mesmerize me again, as you did before, to make me feel strong."

The demand for a further service at his hands was the sweetest form in which she could have clothed her thanks for the delicate care he had taken of her during the

trance. The grave earnestness of his manner, however, was mixed with no elation. He merely said :

"Very gladly ; though I trust you don't feel weak."

"I dare say you know I don't; but the influence is pleasant."

He resumed the long sweeping passes, standing over her, that had been employed satisfactorily on the former occasion ; and she lay with half-closed eyes, enjoying the effect on her delicate nervous system.

"It's like drinking champagne, Marian, without any sense of doing wrong, and without any fear of getting tipsy ; only a hundred times better than that coarse sort of stimulant."

Marston went on and on.

"Aren't you getting tired?" she said at last.

"Physically, no ; not in the least. But I don't suppose I can do you any more real good for the moment. What you feel is a transfer of vital energy ; and you have probably had as much as I can throw off for the moment."

She did not quite understand what he meant at the time; but presently, after he had been sitting down again for awhile, Mrs. Malcolm noticed that he looked tired.

"Why, Sidney," she said, "you have worn yourself out. You look quite faint. Let me get you some wine."

"No, thanks; that will right itself very soon. I would not take wine now on any account."

"But, goodness!" said Edith, springing up; "you *are* looking quite faint. Why did you let me keep you going on? How stupid of me! I forgot."

Marston was faint, and almost giddy; but it was a luxurious weakness under the circumstances.

"If you will be so very kind as to accept my stock of energy without regretting that you have done so, that will give me great pleasure," he said; "and for myself, I shall come perfectly right with a little rest. There is nothing whatever the matter with me. If you will not mind, I will go and lie down for half an hour on the sofa in the dining-room. I would much rather get strength

back that way than by drinking wine, thanks."

Edith was beginning, "I am so sorry——" but she saw the finer courtesy of taking the opposite view of the matter, almost before the words had crossed her lips. "No; I will not be sorry—only much obliged; and I feel as strong as a horse."

Marston looked his appreciation of the impulse that made her say this, and went out of the room across the hall to the dining-room. Mrs. Malcolm went with him, left him comfortably established on the sofa, and returned to the others.

"It must have been the last part of the mesmerism that exhausted him so, I suppose?" Edith asked.

"No doubt. I know that when a sensitive takes up mesmeric influence, the mesmerist feels the strain. No doubt Mr. Marston might make passes for an hour before some people, and merely feel the muscles of his arm tired; but you are such a psychic that I suppose you draw off your mesmerist's vital energy in streams, so to speak—sop it like a sponge."

"I see now that is why I enjoyed it so much. But it was too bad of me. I ought to have guessed——"

"There's no harm done, dear, I'm sure. Sidney Marston would cut himself in pieces for—for such a sensitive as you are;" she watched Edith closely though unobtrusively as she spoke; "he is such a true-hearted enthusiast."

Edith said nothing in reply that afforded Mrs. Malcolm any information.

Ferrars' disturbance of mind oppressed them for the rest of the evening, and Edith eventually went out for a walk in the garden. Mrs. Malcolm brought her a cloak; but the night was not cold, and in the fresh air she could work off some of her superfluous activity. "I am so absurdly buoyant," she said, "I should like to play and sing; but it would jar too much on Mr. Ferrars just now. I shall calm down presently."

Then eventually the time came for the gentlemen to go back to town. When Mrs. Malcolm went to call Marston she found him asleep. She went back and debated with her brother whether he should be waked or

left to sleep on, and ultimately sent to the nearest hotel if he overstayed the last train. Ferrars determined to wait himself for the last train, and stir up Marston in time for that. Then for awhile Mrs. Malcolm joined Edith in the garden, and then saw her off to bed. When she came down she looked into the dining-room and saw Marston awake. She went in and shut the door.

"Sidney, I am glad to have a few words with you before you go. Are you feeling better now?"

"Yes; of course there is nothing the matter with me. I was exhausted for the moment, but this little sleep has refreshed me."

"Good! Then you have all your wits about you to face a serious problem."

"Go on."

"You love her, it appears."

"She has not seen that?"

"Not that I know of; but of course I did, during the trance. It is so, is it not?"

"I love her to that extent that, knowing the situation perfectly hopeless, I ache with a desire to lie down at her feet and die. I

love her as a man loves who has held out against everything of that sort till the tension of his nature becomes something more than he dreams of, and then it gives way after all. Oh, Marian! what have you spoken of it for? It was better resolutely ignored."

"What nonsense! How can you go on like that? She is not an ordinary being. She is half a spirit divine. It is frightful to think of her being engulfed in mere worldly life, and such a marriage as she may be guided to by her relations. I do not say the course before you is easy, but I say you must face the problem and not merely drift. Why did you not let her remember what the Spirit told her, it might have saved her?"

"I should have felt it like debasing psychic power to the service of my selfish love. To drag her by a mesmeric influence to take a step in ordinary life she would shrink from with horror if she were left to ordinary reflection, would be shameful criminality for me — as shameful in another way as the criminality for which I innocently suffer."

"It is noble of you to feel that way. I understood and approved all the while that I felt impatient. But it seems to me that for her sake it is right to wish that your influence over her should be maintained and developed as far as possible. I had plotted something different from that in my own mind, as you know. By-the-bye, now I remember, I spoke to you of that the other day. I did not know how you were feeling."

"Of course not, and the fact that you never conjectured it ensued most naturally from the other facts of the case, and would have been instructive to me, if I had needed such instruction."

Mrs. Malcolm was silent for a while, deeply thinking. At last she said—

"I don't think I would keep up any mystery about yourself, Sidney. Tell her all the facts at once. It is better she should know them now, than come to know about them later; perhaps it would be a greater shock then."

"Is that said from reasoning or from intuition?"

"From reasoning, I suppose. I am too

much agitated to have any intuitions just now."

"So I should have supposed, and reasoning with you is on a lower plane. If my only purpose were to play my hand so as to make the most of the infinitely remote chance of inducing Miss Kinseyle to sacrifice herself to me, then the course you suggest might be the wisest. But I am clear of one thing at any rate—that I will do nothing to try to provoke such a sacrifice. . . . Do I love her? Well, I am *not* sorry you spoke of this. Even to say how I love her, to you only, is some relief. The feeling has taken possession of me in a way which makes existence a kind of frenzy. I think of nothing else. But with it all I can be cool and collected with her, just because there is no issue for the emotion on this plane of existence at all. It is all in the realm of imagination. It is so out of the question that I can ever *tell* her I love her, that I am not perplexed or confused when I am with her."

"But why not tell her all about yourself, and then let things take their course? If

she comes to love you in return, truly she will not let anything stand in her way."

Marston reflected in his turn.

"I don't know—honestly I don't know whether I fear to put an end to our present relations on my own account most, or on hers. But at any rate there would be risk of destroying my usefulness to her. It might somehow jar her feeling about me; it would perturb my confidence in dealing with her, and that might upset my psychic control over her, which is so wonderfully perfect for the moment. That, as it stands, must be for her good, for it enables her to strengthen her spiritual affinities; it has been vouched for to-night by the wisdom that speaks through her lips in trance. We must guard it as long as possible, for her sake."

"My plan might best perpetuate it. I should like the honesty and boldness of that."

"Seek for an intuition on the subject, and tell me that. It would weigh more with me than the argument; and you will not tell it me unless it is a real one—nor mistake any-

thing else for one. But my own instinct warns me not to tell her yet, at any rate."

"You would not wish me to tell her?"

"No, certainly not. I couldn't bear it."

"You must be guided by some future impulse then. You will come each day, I suppose, while she is here?"

"If you will let me."

"Then come to-morrow to lunch; and now you had better be going, if you want to get back to town."

"Is it so late?"

Then they went into the drawing-room and rejoined Ferrars, who was glad to be moving in any way. He and Marston set off for the station.

When Mrs. Malcolm at length went upstairs, she found Edith in a dressing-gown leaning on the banisters at the top.

"My dear child, why haven't you gone to bed?"

"Because I am not sleepy—no more than I am at eleven o'clock in the morning. I am in the middle of writing letters, but I heard the gentlemen go, so I came out to

waylay you for a little chat. I can go on with my letters later."

"It's getting on for twelve," said Mrs. Malcolm, as in a gentle protest, but coming into her room none the less. "The magnetism has gone to your head."

"Yes; but I'm not nervously sleepless—only not tired. And I'm curious about something, though I think I once told you I would not be curious. I am curious to know more about Mr. Marston."

"But, my dearest girl——"

"I know you mustn't say all you know, and I do not want you to; but if there is anything you can say, I should like you to tell me."

Mrs. Malcolm pondered.

"What I can tell is hardly worth telling—what is worth telling I can't tell."

"You see—I suppose it's because he has been mesmerising me—I've got all sorts of queer fancies about him dancing through my head. I could drive them away, I dare say, if I *obstinately* refused to pay attention to them, but——"

"I never thought of that," said Mrs. Malcolm. "Nor did he, I dare say. It

would hardly be like telling you, perhaps, if you can see for yourself. But—oh, Edith! you will put me in a great embarrassment perhaps if you say anything. Suppose you wait till to-morrow, and tell Mr. Marston himself what you read about him clairvoyantly, and let him confirm or explain."

"Very well. If he is coming to-morrow I can do that, if you like. At the same time, I do not want to seem inquisitive. I don't see anything clearly enough to matter. I am only impressed with the idea that he is mixed up with some horrid tragedies—or rather surrounded—walled in, if you understand, by such things, without being properly mixed up in them himself."

"My dear Edith, your vaguest fancies go so dangerously near the mark that I must not talk of them."

"All right; I am sure that I might trust him to play the finest, noblest part, as far as I am concerned, and I am not a bit alarmed about his tragedies, you understand. It won't make me timid about him when I am mesmerised. You need not be afraid of that."

"I am not, dear, because I know the truth

is so. Sidney Marston is a trustworthy guide for your wandering spirit. But, by-the-bye, there is something I can tell you, though he did not——" She reflected for a few moments. "Yes, I can't see why not. It was something your guardian spirit, *our* guardian, said to you while you were in trance. I wanted Mr. Marston to impress you to remember it, but he would not."

"Why, what was it?"

"That you could trust him entirely to lead you right. You repeated that with your own lips as something *she* had just said to you."

"And why wouldn't he let me remember. Ah, but I can see—at least I can feel. It was very nice of him not to use his will to make me remember that. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, but it is just as well you should know it was said."

"I don't think after all I will worry him to tell me anything about his private affairs that it may be disagreeable for him to talk about. He can tell me or let it alone, as he likes, and, meanwhile, I can think of him

not as a personality, but as my guide to the spirit-world. It's a comfort to be able to put one man, at any rate, on so lofty a pedestal."

"You talk as if you were forty, and had sounded the wickedness of the world."

"There are people who have been forty, and you can learn a good deal from them," said Edith gravely, and without giving the phrase any intentionally comic flavour.

But somehow it emphasised her own youth in Mrs. Malcolm's eyes, and made her to that extent seem — as one so freshly emerging from childhood—out of harmony with the tremendous passion of feeling on her account which had been manifested so shortly before by the mature man she respected in the room below. Women may often *sympathize* truly enough with men in their love-troubles, but these can hardly fail to seem in their eyes a kind of craze or ignoble infatuation when looked back upon, so to speak, from the altogether female point of view.

Mrs. Malcolm was truly attached to Edith ; but coolly observing her, and amused for a moment by the sedate and at the same time

childish sagacity of her last remark, she thought of the declaration Marston had made about longing to die at her feet in view of the hopelessness of his love, and she shook her head sadly at the complications of the whole position, wondering at the nature of the magic spell itself, even more than at the thoughtless insouciance with which in this instance it was wielded.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW PHASE.

The two or three days that followed passed quietly over the Richmond household without bringing any startling incidents to disturb the even tenor of Edith's psychic development. Marston came each day at lunch-time, and stayed with them till the evening was spent. None of them cared to go out much beyond the narrow precincts of the garden. They read and talked, and Edith sang to them. They were sometimes all three together, and sometimes either Mrs. Malcolm or Edith would be detained by letters or private occupations, and the remaining two would be left in confidential intercourse. But Marston put off the subject of his own life-history from time to time as a disagreeable topic. He wished Edith to know the sad mystery, he said, but to keep its un-

wholesome shadow as long as possible from interfering with the beautiful experiences she was passing through, and in the development of which he was fortunate enough to be able to be of service to her.

"When you have to leave us," he said one afternoon, "then I shall no longer feel that I am entitled to let you remain under any sense of being kept out of a secret concerning me. Not that it matters to you, in one way. There is nothing in my personal life which renders me unworthy of the privilege of showing you how to use your wings. My final triumph as your teacher will be that you will want me no more; and then——"

"What then?" she asked, for he had seemed to try and put a conclusion to the sentence without being able.

"Nothing will matter then. Othello's occupation will be gone."

"If you think I am likely to learn in a few days all you can teach me—well, you either overrate me very much, or underrate yourself."

"It is not necessary for me to teach you all I know, in one sense, for my knowledge,

such as it is, has been gained by a good deal of laborious study and thought that you need not take the trouble to go over. For reasons I cannot fathom — probably through your own great merits in former lives—you stand very near the fountain-head of all knowledge; very near that exalted spiritual life which is more than knowledge, in our physical sense of the term. Students who have taken great pains to acquire knowledge are sometimes apt to value its results by reference to the trouble they have spent to gain it. But how can I illustrate it? If you want a view over the country, and build a tower stone by stone, at last you may stand on the top and get the view. But if some one else can float up in a balloon, without an effort, whenever he chooses, he gets the required view all the same. I have been building a tower, and you are possessed of a balloon; and with that you can go ten times higher than I can with my tower, such as it is. Why should you plague yourself with the humble task of bricklaying?"

"You can always invent beautifully complimentary similes; but with that remarkable

sagacity you applaud in me I am enabled to discern the fact that, whenever any new question opens itself, I am very ignorant, and you are very full of information. I object to that state of things, and want to have it equalized more."

"Long may you remain of that mind. But let us recognise facts all the same. Just as true as the fact that I have read and thought for many more years than you have yet spent on the process, is the other fact I spoke of: that you stand close to the boundless ocean of — something more than knowledge — of higher spiritual consciousness, which is walled off from humbler mortals by impenetrable barriers. So far the light assistance of mesmeric influence on your own fine physical organism is required to float off your consciousness into the superior realms. If that were not wanted—if you could at will ascend into free communion with that Spirit Queen whom I declare to be simply your own higher self, and then be fully conscious of all that had passed in your waking physical brain—you would be already a more wonderful creature than you are, by a great way.

Such persons may exist in the world, but they are examples of a very abnormal growth indeed. In your case I do not anticipate the development of that state of things. But, as our efforts continue, you are able to remember what you see in trance more and more clearly. The better that memory becomes—the more your impulses and thoughts and emotions in your waking state become saturated with the influence of your higher self—the more you will be spiritualized and guarded from the possibility of any ignoble contagion of lower worldly affinities during life. That kind of saturation of the lower nature by the influences of the higher is the final sum and perfection of knowledge — immeasurably superior to a capacity for quoting learned writers, and arguing out even these doctrines of spiritual science theoretically. So you see I am proving you to be as great as I say—am I not?"

"I don't know. So much of my life is spent in talk so unlike this — in society so far inferior to Marian's and yours—that I sometimes feel a kind of impostor

when you speak of me as you have just been doing."

"That is just the struggle of the dual existence—the spiritual and physical. It is a terrible struggle, even for those who, like yourself, are best armed for it."

"But I think I am very badly armed. You merely see me here, in this delightful retreat, with the most beautiful influences all around. It seems all plain sailing here. To love spiritual culture and my glorious experience best, that is a matter of course. But, however much the best I love them, I go away into a worldly, frivolous life, and am obliged to spend all my time—except a few hasty moments to be snatched now and then in the future for Richmond—in the midst of *such* different things and people. That is not being armed—that is being overwhelmed by my enemy; while you and Marian—you are the people who are armed by circumstance. You can live the life you choose, and be always in contact with higher ideas."

"Marian *is*, I think, in a great measure—— But as for me—well, never mind

about me for the present. Let us keep on talking of a pleasanter subject—yourself. It is just because you are likely to be subject to so many temptations and distractions that I am wishing for you so earnestly that you may become, in some degree, independent of my help in the exercise of your psychic powers, and——"

"There!" cried Edith, suddenly interrupting. "What was that? Didn't you see? Why, good gracious!——"

She had had some light wool-work in her hands, and they were sitting on the lawn sloping down to the river, though screened by bushes, so as to be in privacy as regards the passing boats. Part of the lawn gave directly on the water, and the bushes only screened the corner. With one of her long ivory knitting-needles Edith was pointing to the end bush, and leaning forward.

"What do you mean? I can see nothing, I regret to say."

"Why, Zephyr! I saw him flash through the laurel-bush—all green this time—and look at me with his merry goggle eyes as he stood for a moment on the grass. I saw him

as plain as I've ever seen him in a vision, and I declare I *heard him laugh!*"

"Splendid! and then he vanished?"

"Yes; where on earth has he gone? Zephyr!" called the girl, with bright impetuosity, springing up and going to feel with her hands in the laurel-bush. "Come and show yourself directly. This is something altogether new," she said to Marston. "If he can do that, why did he not do it before?"

"It's you who didn't do it before," Marston said, laughing with the contagion of her own high spirits. "I dare say Zephyr has shown himself before, but this is the first time you have been able to see him. Even now, for example, he has only shown himself to you and not to me; or, in other words, it was only you who were able to see him."

"Oh, Mr. Marston, come in and put me in a trance, and then I shall be sure to see him, and will make him tell me all about it."

Marston agreed, and they went up to the house.

"What makes him take such funny shapes and look such a comic little elf? How

wonderfully, by-the-bye, the realities of psychic things are unlike the sentimental fancies people have about them, if they know nothing of them. Zephyr is a spirit—in a way at any rate, as you explained—and a most amiable, delightful spirit; but he does not at all correspond to the romantic pattern."

"Zephyr, I take it, is an elemental, to use the language of the old writers on occultism —a nature spirit infused with the will of some higher power. Not an organized psychic being like one of us; but a potency of nature on a higher plane of her manifestations. The shape in which he appears to you is no doubt altogether the product of your own imaginings, really."

"But he takes all sorts of shapes."

"Because you have no rigidly formed conception in your own mind of the shape that an elemental, doing the particular work he is employed upon, ought to assume."

Mrs. Malcolm was called down and acquainted with what had occurred; and Edith threw herself on the sofa to be mesmerized, with as much matter-of-course

familiarity now with the whole process as if she had been rushing to the piano to try a new song.

"How *ridiculous* it is," she said, as Marston sat down beside her, and she gave him her hands to hold as naturally as she might have stretched them out to be helped from a carriage, "to think that the vast majority of people argue about the possibility of mesmeric trances and clairvoyance, and so on, when it's just as much a matter of course to us as breakfast and dinner."

"For the most part, you see, the people who know don't argue; it's not worth their while. They don't like to expose themselves to insult from foolish unbelievers. It does not matter to them whether the majority of the world come up to their level or not. They have their own knowledge, and they work with it."

"That does not seem right and generous though; it seems selfish."

"That is according to each man's duty. It is the business of some people to combat unbelief, and put up with the abuse they get for their pains—not a very serious *corvée*

either for that matter. But there are other people who need not do any such rough work — people like yourself, for instance. Let you ask your Higher Self whether you are bound to go talking about her to every common-place materialist you meet, and I strongly suspect you will be told to keep your own counsel."

"But my arms are tingling up to the elbow."

"And I am forgetting my business, keeping you gossiping here. Now I am only"— going through the usual ceremonies and passes as he spoke—"on guard over your wanderings, and ready within call if wanted."

A few injunctions to sleep, and a few moments spent with his hands over her closed eyes, produced the usual effect.

It was to cross-question Zephyr that Edith had had herself launched into the mesmeric state; but she sank into a very profound torpor —at first faintly answered Marston's questions enough to show her consciousness not altogether out of his reach, but indicated a wish to be left alone as much as possible.

"Never mind Zephyr just now," she said,

when Marston reminded her of what she had wanted to enquire about. "Wait a little while; I may have something to say."

This was a new phase of her clairvoyance. Marston and Mrs. Malcolm exchanged looks of interest, both recognising the attitude now taken up as an advance, in its relative independence, on those of her previous trances.

"There is something you ought to know about me," she said presently, speaking slowly and calmly, "and that is that I am not qualified to remain long in earthly life. No one about me seems to be aware of it yet; but my lungs are very weak, and must give way rather quickly when they once begin to show disease."

"What ought to be done to save you?"

She looked troubled, and remained silent for a time. Then she said:

"I must not answer that question."

Marston and Mrs. Malcolm looked at each other, anxious and a little bewildered.

"What's wrong about the question?" Marston said aside; and then to Edith:

"Do you mean that your early death is really inevitable?"

Still she did not seem to like the form of the question; but answered:

"No."

"Then can you indicate any course of action we might take to prolong your life?"

"Your mesmeric influence would do that."

"Then I may use it for that purpose, may I not?"

"Yes, if you choose; but you will find it very difficult. There will be great obstacles in the way, and if you use it that way it will be at great cost to yourself."

"I may say to you now, and speaking this way—*not* for you to remember in your physical life—that of course it does not matter what the cost is to me if I can do you service."

"I can see you would be ready to give your life for me if you thought that best; but perhaps it might not be. There are things I must not say. You must do what you think right; but, if it is best, you can make me live."

Mrs. Malcolm here put in a few words:

"Surely you can ask her now whether it

would be best that your life should be united with hers."

Marston pondered over the idea for a little while, Edith remaining in a state of complete quiescence. Then he put the question:

"Ought I, for your sake, to strive that you may be willing to unite your life with mine?"

The answer came slowly and in a low voice, but in the same impassive tone in which the other utterances had been given.

"There is a union of sympathy between us which need not be long interrupted; but, in earth-life, such union as you are thinking of would not be best. Strive to prolong our present relationship — that is best for us both."

"My soul's queen!" murmured Marston, deeply affected; "all shall be as you direct."

"Tell me, when I return to you, about Zephyr," she went on. "Your influence is clearing my vision, and I shall be able to see my Guardian's messenger more plainly in future, and gather tidings of her, from him, without being entranced. But, remember, it

will be at your cost that my higher faculties will be strengthened—whether you are near me or away. I shall live on your life. But if my lower consciousness is too soon aware of this, there will be risk that all sacrifices may be useless."

The utterances she was giving forth this time were of so spontaneous a character that Marston's usual habit of continually plying her with questions seemed no longer applicable, and he sat waiting for what she should say next. After a long pause, she said:

"Tell Marian that George will find the woman he is in search of, but he will want more money than he has with him. She should send this to him, and he should be sure to take the woman to the girl's father before he reaches England."

Then, after a further pause:

"You need not entrance me again. I must learn to get what I ought to know through Zephyr, in my lower consciousness."

"I will obey your directions exactly."

"Do not think of them as commands from my Higher Self. You will be tempted to seek guidance from me in trance—and you

are not forbidden, only warned that it may not be best. You should rely on your own judgment in the crisis that will arrive, and you will have power to unite what remains of my life with your own if you choose. It is right that you should know this, lest what I have told you should cripple your freedom of action. You may recall me now, after a little while, and, in my earthly consciousness, I shall remember nothing of what I have now been saying. I have been speaking to you this time as I could never speak before. You could only get, from these lips hitherto, confused reflections of myself. The real 'I' has now been speaking to you, for the body has become a more docile instrument, but for that reason it had better now be worked in a new way. It will be exhausted as it has not been before by the strain it has gone through. Lay your hand upon the heart, and let it revive by degrees."

Marston did as directed, and they sat watching Edith's motionless form in silence for some time.

"This is a terrible secret to be burdened with," Mrs. Malcolm said.

"We must consult about it later," Marston answered.

"Meanwhile you will tell her all she should know. Oh! Sidney—— "

Mrs. Malcolm's last exclamation was uttered in a low tone, but as in response to a sudden perception of something wonderful.

"What do you see?"

Mrs. Malcolm had been sitting, as usual during Edith's magnetic trances, near the foot of her sofa, behind Marston, whose chair, placed near her head, enabled him to lean over her sideways to perform the magnetic passes. Leaning forward now, she —Mrs. Malcolm—was looking up in the air above Edith's form, and impulsively she stretched out both her hands.

"Did you see nothing? The Guardian Spirit herself was visible to me for a time—my Guardian, just as I have always seen her: the faint veil over her head, and the luminous white drapery. She seemed to float away towards the window and disappear."

"I saw nothing," said Marston, "except some undefinable change on Edith's face."

The girl now moved slightly, and sighed.

"Don't you *feel* anything? It seems to me that I am enveloped in that peculiar sensation of rapture or exaltation which the sight of my Guardian always brings with it——"

"She is coming to herself," Marston said.

Edith opened her eyes, but did not immediately spring up into a sitting posture, as she had generally done.

"Is it over?" she said, as Marston withdrew his hand from her side. "What has been happening? I don't remember anything. I might just as well have been asleep in the ordinary way, except that I feel tired."

"Not disagreeably tired—not any sense of pain?"

"Pain! no. Nothing of that sort—merely limp. What has been going on? Have I missed fire this time, somehow?"

"About as far from that as two ideas can be apart," Marston answered. "You have been rather more wonderful than usual—and you feel the strain. We will tell you about it directly."

"But it is stupid not to remember things. I thought I was getting on better than that. I feel all cloudy and confused. What was it we were intending to do in particular?"

"Wait a little, till you recover more fully. You will have plenty to think about directly."

"You must make me strong again," she said in a few minutes, "if you will promise not to kill yourself; otherwise, I won't let you."

"How are you to help it, if I choose?" said Marston, with a smile, as he began the long passes.

"By imposing my sovereign commands upon you. That is the understood bargain between us. I surrender myself to your will entirely on the simple condition that you always make me do exactly what I choose; and now I choose to be made strong again at your expense—only I must not use you up entirely all at once. I might want you again, you know, another time."

This way of putting the case was far sweeter to Marston, of course, than any explicit consideration for his interests; and

Edith had got into the habit of clothing her most sympathetic and grateful impulses towards him in the guise of the most commanding language. She rapidly brightened under the influence to which she was now subject, and presently sat up.

"That will do. I feel all right again. Now I will graciously permit you to sit down and tell me all about it."

"The great and important fact," said Marston, subsiding again into his chair, "is that you are now going to be clairvoyante without going into trances at all. Your humble servant's services are not wanted any more!"

"You don't mean that you are to stop mesmerising me?"

"On the contrary; your orders are quite clear on that head. My magnetic influence upon you is distinctly approved of, and I am instructed to do all I can to keep it in operation, though warned there will be difficulties in the way of doing this."

"When I have to go away, of course. But if you are not to entrance me I do not understand——"

Without hinting a word as to the revelations concerning herself that were to be kept secret from her, Marston explained at great length the immense practical advantage that was promised in the establishment of her faculties in a state that would enable her without the aid of any external magnetism to keep up relations with the higher plane of her own consciousness. She was also told about the message she had given to Mrs. Malcolm. This turned the conversation upon Ferrars' affairs. There had not yet been time for his sister to hear from him since his departure. He had sent word that he should travel without delay to Seville, and that was the place to which letters were to be sent after him.

"What an extraordinary thing that I should talk about his money," said Edith.

"It is a pity, my dear," replied Mrs. Malcolm, "that while you were talking about it you did not give me more precise information as to the amount George would want. I can't think what I ought to send him. He is sure to have gone provided sufficiently for all travelling needs. It must be some un-

looked for emergency that he will be called upon to meet."

"There will be an opportunity," Marston said to Edith, "of exercising your new rights over Zephyr. You might make up your mind when next you see him to make him find out for you what the money is wanted for, and how much Mrs. Malcolm ought to send."

"What an idea—that I have an omniscient sprite at my beck and call! But the worst of it is he is *not* at my beck and call. I do not know in the least how to summon him."

"Never mind that. Keep on your mind what you want to know from him when you do see him, and then the opportunity will not be wasted when it comes."

Eventually Edith went away to her own room for a time, declaring she must absolutely write a few lines to her aunt before it was too late for that day, and Mrs. Malcolm and Marston were left together.

"How do you read it all?" she asked.

"I think it is impossible to read it all at present. The whole statement seems to

point to some future crisis when perhaps the warnings given now may be of use. I do not in the least see what is to be done for the present—except that you should clearly keep her with you as long as you can."

"She will certainly have to leave me in a few days. She merely came for that time, and will have overstayed it by a day or two before she goes, in any case."

"Where can the doubt be about my doing what I can to save her life?"

"It would be a miserable view of the matter for us; but for her! She may be ripe for something better than life."

"That is a poetical view of the question; but there my own dull, philosophical way of looking at these things comes into play. Life is always another word for opportunity. I can easily imagine that Edith might be *happier*—much happier—if she were to float off into a purely spiritual existence; but I take it that there are infinite gradations of exaltation in that existence, and how is a human soul fitted for the higher gradations? Evidently, it seems to me, by the upward

struggling of *this* life. This is the school—the other existence the sphere in which each soul profits by what it has learned."

"But in the next life Edith, for example, will be — by your own theory — her own Higher Self, a far higher being than she is now, as we see her on this plane."

"But that Higher Self is merely the sum total of all she has gone through, learned, and suffered for in all former stages of her existence up to this. She would not be now an incarnate being at all if she had not more still to gain from the lessons of life. If her experience of this is now suddenly arrested, some effort which her Higher Self was making by means of this incarnation will be defeated, it seems to me. But I'm hardly clear enough in my mind to think the question fully out. For the moment it seems to me as if a somewhat considerable cheque had been drawn on my vital forces."

He had dropped down into the easy chair Mrs. Malcolm had quitted when Edith left the room. Mrs. Malcolm was far too appreciative of the whole situation to offer commonplace condolences on his exhaustion.

"You must learn," she said, "to *menager* your strength, for her sake. It would not do for you to break down prematurely."

"No; that must be avoided. I shall watch my feelings. But this sort of lassitude passes away, or rather, the lost vitality is somehow restored always, after a bit."

"I'll leave you quiet and go and write to George."

CHAPTER III.

A PAINFUL REVELATION.

The few remaining days of Edith's Richmond visit slipped away all too quickly, though the principal interest of its earlier days—her magnetic trances—had been suspended. The lost excitement connected with these was fully supplied by the newer development of her psychic faculties and the frequent appearance in their midst—though to her vision only—of the mysterious agency by means of which it had been promised that her relations with the higher plane of nature should be kept up. "Zephyr" paid no regard to dramatic effect in his visitations, and neither associated his coming with the solemnity of late hours nor the romantic flavour of invocations. He had flashed upon Edith's consciousness for the first time after her last trance on the evening of that same

day while they were all three at dinner, and Mrs. Malcolm's two maids present and engaged upon the prosaic duty of handing the vegetables and sauce. Edith's attention was suddenly caught while she was in the act of helping herself to potatoes and talking about Miss Barkley. The flow of her speech suddenly arrested, the bright half-startled, half-delighted look on her face, suggested to both the others what she saw in the corner of the dining-room towards which her gaze was directed. And they all understood one another so well that everything passed openly amongst them in effect, without the servants being in the least degree enlightened as to what they meant by the disjointed phrases uttered.

"Zephyr!" she said simply, with a glance at Marston.

"How much?" was his immediate reply, to remind her of the information specially wanted from him.

There was a picture hanging in the recess of the room at the corner towards which Edith was looking.

"Oh! I understand. He seemed to write

it with his finger across the Rembrandt—200."

"Well," said Mrs. Malcolm, "since it is a large amount that is wanted, I am glad it isn't a larger. I can manage that."

"But what I want to know," Edith began, and then stopped. She laughed directly afterwards, and added: "What a funny idea. That's a most interesting picture of yours, Marian—that Rembrandt."

"That is the old story, you know. Imaginative critics will often see more in a work of art than the artist means to put there."

"I'll discuss the merits of the picture with you at leisure another time."

Afterwards she explained that she had stopped in saying what she had wanted to know, because Zephyr had obviously anticipated her thought before it was fully spoken. She had been desirous of learning how she could summon him when she wanted to ask him a question, and he had all in a moment conjured up a vision in which she had seen herself vehemently pulling a bell-handle, while she saw him at the same time asleep at a distance, and paying no attention. Then

in the next instant, by a change in the picture, she saw herself sitting dejectedly in a chair with her face in her hands, and the moment she assumed this attitude the sleeping Zephyr in the distance sprang up and flashed through space to her side.

"It was a roundabout way of implying evidently that I had no power to call him, but that he would be ready to come whenever I should really be in need of him."

"And not a very roundabout way either," suggested Marston, "considering the short time it took to evoke the pictures in your fancy. From our physical habits and experience, we get into the way of thinking that speech is the only respectable medium for the conveyance of ideas from one mind to another, but directly the faculties are set free from physical restraints, we always find other modes employed. I remember you made use of a very suggestive phrase in one of your trances when you said that Zephyr came back to you so full of the idea he had gone in search of that he 'splashed it over you.' I do not suppose that he stopped to make use of words then. The idea was suddenly communicated

to your mind by a process analogous to what in electric science is called induction. If people would only pay attention to them, the phenomena of physical science would be seen to teem with illustrations and analogies showing what goes on on the psychic plane."

Then, on another occasion, Edith became conscious of Zephyr's presence when she was alone in her own room at night. Some other symbolical pictures had been shown her, "But the great point gained," Marston argued, when they spoke of the incident, "is that you are used to the exercise of your own abnormal vision, so that it does not make you nervous when it takes you unprepared by yourself."

"Not in the least," Edith answered. "I look on Zephyr as an established friend and protector. But I do not want to see all kinds of other shapes and forms that I do not understand, and I am just a little apprehensive that I shall get to see too much after a time. I am constantly now having the feeling when I am alone that I am *not* alone altogether, and I seem to see misty figures near me out of the corners of my eyes."

Marston was able to give her some directions for use against annoyances of that kind, and Edith was greatly struck with the resources of his knowledge.

"It has been gathered," he explained, "partly from books, partly from association with other students of occult mysteries. There is a much greater abundance of knowledge on these subjects floating about in the world really than our highly self-satisfied century is generally aware of, and for my part circumstances have driven me to find my only interests in life in the exploration of these little trodden paths of research."

They were talking now on the last evening of Edith's visit. It was arranged that Mrs. Malcolm would go up to town in the morning, and see her with her maid into the train that would take her to Deerbury Park. She had been lamenting her impending descent into the lower world of mere amusement and dissipation, and the others were oppressed with the shadow of their coming loss. Mrs. Malcolm had been giving free expression to her regrets. For Marston, the aching sense of desolation with which he contemplated her

departure was too intense to be shaped into any such words as he could speak.

"I am sure," Edith said, in reply to his last remark, "that you must be greatly the gainer in leading a life of such inquiry as compared to a more commonplace existence."

"Well," Marston answered, "I think you may as well know all about it."

Mrs. Malcolm saw what was coming; looked from one to the other with something like a frightened glance, then got up hastily and left the room. Edith caught the expression, looked after her in wonder, and then with bewildered expectation at Marston. She was sitting in her old corner of the sofa in which her magnetic trances had taken place, Marston in an easy chair at a little distance.

"Why has Marian gone in that strange way?"

"I suppose she thinks, in the delicacy of her sympathy with me, that what I have to tell you would be made even more painful in the telling if a third person—even herself—were by. Perhaps she is right."

His face was set very rigidly, and he

pulled for a few moments nervously at his small moustache, that failed to conceal the working of his sensitive lips. He got very pale, and his dark eyes shone with more lustre than usual as he turned them on Edith for a little while before he spoke again, with a mute entreaty. Then he drew his hand across his forehead, and went on :

" My great secret is very easily told. I live under the weight of a great shame brought upon me by my father. Ah, it will shock you ; and yet my only excuse for having drifted into intimacy with you—for having dared to avail myself of the priceless privilege of having been of service to you—if I may think that I have been that—has been that, personally, I am as blameless in the matter through which I suffer as though I had never been struck down with this strange curse."

" You frighten me, somehow ; but I know that, whatever horrors you have been surrounded with, it can only be the deepest sympathy that is due to you. How can I have any other feeling but that of gratitude for all the help you have given me ?"

'You owe me nothing worth calling by that name. You are too exalted. But, before I go on, I would gladly hear you say—— But no!" he cried, checking himself impetuously; "there shall be no weakness of that sort. I have humbly sought to be of service to you. I shall always treasure the belief that, in some degree, I have been that; and I shall be repaid a thousand-fold if you decide, on reflection, that you do not regret having accepted a service at my hands. My father," he went on, speaking hurriedly now, and in a hard tone, "was a man of strong and ungovernable passions, restrained neither by religion of the ordinary kind nor by the views of life and the future which, for some philosophical thinkers, supply an almost sterner rule of conduct. With my mother, since dead, he was unhappy—no matter by whose fault. They separated, and he formed an attachment of a wildly vehement character for another woman. In her affections he was, as he believed—and as I believe also—treacherously supplanted by another man. I need not go into the details now. In the

end my father killed him. It was no duel: a sudden meeting—an attack; what the law decided to have been a murder. If the woman concerned had been his wife, probably the result would somehow have been different. But no extenuation was seen in an unholy passion. My father was condemned to death, and punished—as murderers are generally punished."

It was Edith's turn now to grow pale; and she lay back trembling, only giving vent to a low cry of distress.

"Our name," Marston went on, after a pause, "rang through the country. I took refuge in another. The family property—no fortune, but enough for all the wants that could survive for me—was restored to me, the eldest son. I had one brother, with whom I divided it, and he went to Australia. Mrs. Malcolm and George Ferrars are my only friends of the former time. I have known them both from children. Hers is a heart of gold. You know now why I am a recluse; why I cannot go about in the world like those on whom there is no horrible taint of infamy."

Edith did not speak, for she had put her

handkerchief to her face, and had no control of her lips for the moment.

"In the study," Marston went on in a low voice, "of human life, in those of its relations which have nothing to do with this ghastly plain of physical illusion, I have found a strange refuge, and—a sort of callous capacity to endure my lot. I should never have emerged from my usual habits, when Marian first sent for me to meet you, if I had not met you before. But accident had decreed that meeting; and, divining then something of what your nature was, I thought I might be of use to you, and I came. Then the situation grew to what it has been. How could I dash my horrible story in your face, to trouble the current of your psychic development? Concealment has been horrible; but I have not practised it, God knows, for any selfish end. And now I have the agony of telling all this on the last night I shall see you. Perhaps that makes it worse; but —how can there be worse or better in such a matter?"

Edith vaguely shook her head, keeping her face still covered.

"It is awful!" she said, in the awkward, strained tone that her emotion caused.

Marston sat gazing at her in silent misery for some time. Then he slowly got up from his chair and stood by it, with his hand on the back and one knee upon the seat:

"So I have told you what I had to tell, and now I had better go. You are too much aghast to think connectedly just now, I can well imagine; but what I was nearly saying, just before I told you, was this—that I should be glad to hear you say, if that really was the case, that you thought I had been of use to you. Nothing could be more dreadfully out of place than thanks. But if, looking back on the thing, you can feel that you do not regret having accepted some loyal and respectful service at my hands, on your upward course, it will be all the comfort I can expect in life to hear that that is the case. And now I bid you, most reverentially, good-bye."

In the intensity of his self-abasement he bowed, and was moving to the door without attempting any more intimate leave-taking. He had his hand on the lock, but she called almost angrily to him to wait. He obeyed

her literally, and paused as he stood by the door.

"You mustn't go like that," she said. "It *is* horrible—but you needn't talk as if you were guilty. Am I a wretch with no feeling, that I should not give you sympathy?"

"I am blameless, as I say," Marston replied, coming back as far as the chair he had formerly occupied, but no further; "but I am tainted. You may struggle against the feeling as you please, and try to persuade yourself it is wrong, but you will feel it none the less. Against that feeling on the part of most people I should rage furiously, therefore I live by myself. With you——" the depth of tenderness with which he said the words made him hesitate, but he covered up the signs of emotion with an allusion to their psychic relationship, "with you whom I have been so closely thrown with for a short time by reason of your psychic requirements, it would not be fury, but great wretchedness I should feel in observing the signs of it."

"Why don't you shrink from Marian?"

He could not immediately answer the pointed question. At last he said:

"I have no right to anticipate Marian's attitude of mind from anyone else."

"I could not speak to you before," said Edith, "because I was crying. But it was wrong of you to think I could let you go without shaking hands."

Marston made no impulsive movement towards her, and uttered no words in response. Perhaps the phrase she used, however kindly meant, could only intensify his pain. What was it after all to shake hands with her, when every fibre of his body was yearning to prostrate itself before her and worship her feet with kisses? And he could not even profess a wish for more than her pity and her friendly farewell.

"The strain is so agonizing," he said after a pause—the words bearing no necessary reference to anything but the story he had told—"that I think I had better go. I shall be very eager to know how the whole position presents itself to your mind to-morrow. You will tell Marian for me anything you can say in full sincerity. Don't even try to say anything appropriate now. Since you permit me, good-bye," coming up to her, and taking

her hand—which she gave him without rising, looking up at him as she did so, pale and tearful.

"I am so crushed and bewildered I do not know what to say. But you talk as if you expected me to turn away from you with horror. How can anything but the most intense sympathy be due to you?"

"Unreasonable impulses are too strong for argument in this extraordinary case. You will find no justification in what I have told you for any harsh words or attitude of mind towards me on your part. But my revelations have nevertheless hollowed out a gulf between us, and I shall remain for you on the further side of it, no matter how you try to convince yourself that this ought not to be so. The sense of bewilderment you speak of is the recognition of this. I can see the gulf plainly enough. For once my inner sight is keener than yours. It is so far well, at all events, that I did not tell you sooner. My intuition was right in that respect. If I had done so I should have failed in the little part I had to perform in helping you to realize and exercise your own higher faculties. Had you

known sooner, you would have been too much chilled and disquieted to have trusted yourself with any confidence to my guidance. And yet—if I have enjoyed the privilege of your intimate friendship for some few days by a kind of false pretence—the thought is maddening."

"Don't say that—there was no false pretence."

The conversation had been broken by pauses. Marston's remarks were not smoothly fluent, and he remained standing near her for a little while, offering nothing better than a gloomy shake of the head as a response to her vague deprecation of his self-reproach.

"Well," he said at last, "in the end it could only be the same, anyhow; and the end has come. May the shadow of my wretchedness pass away swiftly from your bright and beautiful life—good-bye!" This time he went without pausing, and without any second recall; and without seeking Mrs. Malcolm left the house. She heard the hall-door close—she had been on her knees in the dining-room—and returned to Edith, who remained sitting upright on the sofa.

"Has he gone—altogether?" Mrs. Malcolm asked.

"Yes. Oh, Marian, what an awful horror!"

Mrs. Malcolm looked at Edith with an anxious gaze of inquiry.

"But why should he have rushed away like that?" Mrs. Malcolm was embarrassed by wondering whether anything more had passed beyond the great confession of the facts. "I thought a little sympathy from you would have seemed easier to give with no third person by. That was why I left you."

"I have been simply stunned; I did not know what to say. He was going even without shaking hands; but I made him do that. Then he would go, all the same."

"Did you not think any good could have been done by talking further? I often think that, horrible as his position is, he is morbid about it, and makes it even worse than it need be. I have always found that open expression of sympathy is a sort of relief to him. Everyone must feel it; but some people are shy of putting thoughts like that into words."

"I had no thoughts to utter; I was crushed, flattened down by the ghastly surprise of the thing. I wonder did he think me quite unfeeling and cruel. He kept on accusing himself in such a wild way of having been with us on false pretences, as it were. I only felt bewildered, and I don't seem to have said anything to him to speak of."

"That was a pity. A few words from you would have gone so far."

By degrees Mrs. Malcolm realized the scene in all its details. She did not reproach Edith for having been unduly or unkindly frigid. She sat down by her and caressed her, and sympathized with her for the shock she had experienced; but explained how she herself never was conscious of any repulsion in regard to Marston, by reason of having known him so long and respected him so thoroughly. She spoke of his character, so wonderfully free from all ignoble traits, so self-effacing and modest; and of his intellectual attainments and mental powers as obliterating—for her who had known him intimately all her life—all consciousness of

that "taint of infamy" of which he had spoken.

"Sometimes I think it is a mere unwholesome fancy on his part to suppose people generally would regard him as so tainted if he went more about in the world; but it is impossible to say. Anyhow, it is very hard on him; and he is qualified for such a different sort of life than that on which he has been driven back. The richness and depth of his natural feelings might have made him live a very full life; but they have all turned to gall and bitterness, and he is so much the more wretched."

As a consequence of the talk they had, it ensued that early the following morning Marston received at his chambers a telegram from Mrs. Malcolm.

"Be at King's Cross at 12.30 to say good-bye. This is Edith's imperative desire."

Of course Marston was there, and they walked about together on the platform, and sat in the waiting-room; and at first nothing was said in regard to what had passed the evening before. He asked Edith a few

questions in a grave, subdued way about her journey, and the arrangements made for meeting her at the other end. Edith said she was not looking forward to her Deerbury Park visit with any great anticipation of pleasure—the break up of the wonderfully interesting time they had had together was so much to be regretted.

"There will be nobody at my aunt's to take me out of myself, and show me the way to the spirit world as you have done."

"But my small share in doing that was over, you know, in any case. Your tutor had been formally dismissed, and your coming of age as a clairvoyante in your own right fully recognised."

"My tutor had not been dismissed, and would not have been allowed to absent himself, had I been able to remain at Richmond."

Mrs. Malcolm had wandered off to the book-stall, and this left them practically alone for the moment.

"And he is not dismissed, as matters stand, even. That is why I wanted to see you again before I started. I want to know

if I may write to you and consult you about anything that may happen to me. If Zephyr comes to see me, I am sure to want to discuss his proceedings with some one who will understand all about it. Last night, you know, I was so much upset that I did not think to say this. You will answer any questions I send you, will you not?"

"Most assuredly, if you are so good as to wish it."

"That is right, because I think, on looking back, that I was so unfeeling with you last night—at all events, I showed so little feeling—that you would have been entitled to be offended with me."

"Well, it is very kind of you to say that, at any rate, though the idea is in rather ludicrous contrast with the real features of the case. How can I venture to put it more clearly? Can you easily imagine yourself 'offended' with the Spirit Queen you have seen in your visions?"

Edith smiled, understanding the force of the comparison, but demurely repudiated it.

"My Guardian is a divine being for me,

and very different from a creature of flesh and blood."

"Well, then, I look upon her and yourself as so closely identified in the way you understand, that you must let me regard you as sharing in the divinity. People who do not realize all that we know about, may only see in you what even then indeed they may be inclined to worship, for that matter. But for me, it is my privilege at least to worship in you all that we both know resides there. The result of which is that even if you had not been able to bear to have anything further to do with me, it would not have been resentment I should have felt, but only sorrow; and even that would have been sub missive to your decision."

"That's all very nice and flattering to me, of course, but in my everyday flesh and bones I am not in the least entitled to worship. You do not at all realize the depths of commonplaceness there are in me really. You have seen the best side of me, and very little of the other, and you overrate me quite ridiculously; but that does not matter, if it does not give rise to any painful reaction

afterwards. I want to feel quite sure of your steady cool trustworthy friendship at all times. So now that I have apologized for being so stupid and disagreeable last night, I may rely on that, may I not?"

"You may indeed, since you graciously wish it, in spite of last night. Of course, if it pleases you to pretend to be apologetic, I can only submit to that caprice as I would to any other."

"I am not sure that is being sufficiently respectful. Marian," she added gaily, as they strolled up the platform, meeting Mrs. Malcolm, "Mr. Marston says I am horribly capricious. Do you think so badly of me?"

Mrs. Malcolm was glad to find the conversation on this footing, but was never apt at badinage, so she merely put the question off by promising to discuss Edith's numerous failings with Mr. Marston after she had gone.

"If you dare! That would be shocking. I shall get Zephyr to reveal all your treachery to me, so you must only say the sweetest things, or you will be found out."

"Will you want Zephyr to assure you that we are saying sweet things of you?"

"You dear Marian! You are as bad as Mr. Marston. Long may it last, and soon may my visit be repeated. I feel as if I were losing all my liberty. I wonder what will have happened when we three meet again."

Further talk of this kind, however, was interrupted by the necessity of choosing places for the travellers. Edith had her maid with her in her own compartment, and when they were once installed, nothing more could be said beyond the frivolities of the moment. Edith had quite recovered her spirits under the sense of having behaved nicely to Marston in compensation for what she had come to feel her want of consideration for him the previous evening, and took notice of the people around, whispering little jokes to her companions, and amused herself by alluding aloud to some of the secrets they shared, in veiled phrases that could bear no meaning to the public ear. Marston met her mood as the train moved off by a parting gesture reminding her of their mesmeric relations, and laughingly she called back to him from the windows to "take care of the thread."

CHAPTER IV.

PASSIONS IN CONFLICT.

Terra Fildare had not accepted without some impatience her father's announcement of his intention to come home for her wedding, and his authoritative desire that the proceedings should await his arrival. Count Garciola had resented the delay. He cared nothing about the *éclat* of the ceremony, he explained to Lady Margreave—nothing about whether Terra's father approved or disapproved. He cared for her, he declared, with somewhat haughty indifference to all else beside.

"I make too great a tax on your hospitable patience if I stay here. I put too great a tax on myself if I go away."

Of course Lady Margreave endeavoured to relieve his anxiety on this head by polite assurances.

"Your courtesy does not alter the facts," he urged in his grave grand way of talking, his dark handsome face showing no gratification. "It is my love for Terra that makes me impatient truly, but nothing less than that would make me patient. Colonel Fildare's estimation of me as his son-in-law is a circumstance that does not interest me in itself."

"My dear Count, I know it is the lover and not the *grande seigneur* who is unreasonable, so I will not be cross. But it is nice to be on pleasant terms with one's wife's relations. And the Fildares, you know, are not used to think lightly of their family dignity, though it may not seem important in your eyes."

The fuller information, it should be explained, concerning Count Garciola that had been obtained by Sir James Margreave through the Spanish Embassy since the settlement of his engagement with Terra, had more than confirmed the current idea about him in London society, that he was a man of genuine rank at home. His official connection with the Embassy, though of a temporary

character, had from the first guaranteed him against all suspicion of being in any way a person of doubtful identity. His countship was undeniable, and, in truth, it appeared represented a great deal more than an empty title. He was rich and highly honoured, though his career had been stormy and irregular, and passed a great deal abroad. His present appointment was supposed to be a sort of experiment on his part to see how he might be able to put up with the burdens and restraint of an official station.

"There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth amongst the gilded matrons of Madrid," Sir James's friend at the Spanish Embassy had sent him word, "when the news you send me reaches their ears."

"I am glad you are even a greater man than I had supposed," said Terra, talking with him after Sir James had communicated to her these facts. "I am not fit for a humble station in life."

"You are fit to be an empress," he answered. "But how do you know what station I shall give you? Perhaps we shall travel for awhile. I have always been im-

pelled to seek fresh scenes. Why should I deny my impulse because I shall have the loveliest woman on earth with me wherever I choose to go?"

"So be it, Salvio; wherever we go I shall be the wife of my husband, and that station will content me."

She put her arm through his, and joined her hands together, and leaned up against his shoulder. The time had gone by when she found caresses repulsive. Her pride was merged now in her passion. She was proud of the man who had been great enough to conquer her. She would glory in talking with him of her subjugation—in explaining how no one, before he came, had raised in her heart any feeling but angry independence. She had been a stormy, untamed creature, unfit for the smooth docility of conventional love. She used to fancy, she told him, she had been created without some instinct that all other women possessed, so hateful was it to her to think of subduing her will, and meekly accepting the *rôle* of obedience. Evidently, in truth, she had been marked out as a noble quarry from the first, fit only to

be brought down by a royal hunter. And now, having been vanquished under conditions that satisfied her pride, she revelled in the double sense of superiority to the world at large and of slavery to the master who had been strong enough to make her his prey.

Garciola accepted her worship with deep satisfaction, and calm, faint smiles, that were all the more intense in their expression for the slightness of the muscular change they caused in his grave, immobile features. There was nothing affected in his grand, slow manner; it was perfectly natural, but suggestive, in spite of its languor, of powerful feeling beneath the surface—rather, perhaps, of feelings having to do with self and pride than with the ardour of a love that could go forth; but still revealing great force of passion, even if of the kind chiefly that claims rather than gives. He had indicated his wish early in the proceedings for a prompt settlement of the wedding. He would agree to anything desired by Sir James about money matters, and all arrangements of that kind could be put through at

the embassy; but he loftily insisted that there should be no delay.

"My dear Count," Sir James remonstrated; "we must give her father time to telegraph a message back. It wouldn't be mannerly to disregard him to that extent."

When the telegram came, emphatically insisting that the wedding should wait for Colonel Fildare's arrival, the Count had been, not furious — that word would imply a more demonstrative kind of emotion than that which possessed him—but darkly incensed.

"I am not used to be thwarted by other men's whims!" he said to Sir James. "Who cares whether Colonel Fildare hands Terra to me at the altar, or any other man? What do I care for forms and mummeries?"

Sir James saw that his feeling was too nearly allied to anger to be treated with anything but the most diplomatic courtesy. His own temper, tact, and good-breeding were taxed to the utmost to avert any breach, on the Count's part, of the outward forms of politeness; but the crisis passed over without the exhibition of any dis-

pleasure of a sufficiently violent kind to prevent the guest from staying on at Oatfield. In conversation with Terra he gave vent to his irritation more freely.

"Checks of this sort," he said, "are the obstacles in life to which I have never submitted. Your caprices, had you shown any, would have been difficulties it would have been inspiring to contend with. However obstinately they might have stood in the way of my wishes, I could have been patient with them. But, once you consent to put your hand in mine, and pledge me your faith, I can endure no interference from others. All opposition that presumes to speak to me as with authority is something I only burn to crush and trample upon."

"It will not be for long, Salvio," Terra pleaded; "and this delay once over, there will never be anyone whose authority over me will stand in your way again."

"I should like to carry you off and marry you my own way, with no stupid whims of relations to stand between the glorious simplicity of our union. It is just because the fuss of the world, and the endless cackling of

impertinent people round, has always made marriage seem odious to me, that I have stood apart from it till now. I hoped with you there need have been no such exasperating worry."

Terra was frightened at his wrath, but in no mood to combat it.

"Try and think of the strange fact that you have conquered me so completely," she said. "It is so surprising to me that I am constantly wondering at my own change of nature. I suppose, without knowing it, I was really craving for a master who *could* rule me, all the while I seemed only resenting with indignation the idea of being ruled. It was the idea of being ruled by anyone not strong enough to do it by his own natural force that disgusted me really, I dare say."

"You are splendid, my own beautiful leopardess! I can see how fierce you would have been with others; and, if it were not for that, I should hardly have taken pleasure in your love as I do. But you do not tell me how you would like to be swept off as by a whirlwind, and married in London as soon

as the express train should arrive. Money and influence would arrange all that, even here, in your law-loving England."

"Oh, Salvio, don't think of anything so wild! It would be such a dreadful insult to the Margreaves; such a scandal!"

There had not been the tone of a settled purpose in his desperate proposal; but it chimed in with his temper of mind to dally with the idea, and play with Terra's double dismay at the course of action suggested, and at the thought of resisting his will, should he choose to force it upon her.

"I am not sure that I could enter on my married life so satisfactorily in any other way. That would be a better marriage vow, on your part, of loyalty to me, than any you could read out of a book, or repeat at a priest's dictation."

"I know you're joking and only tormenting me for the fun of the thing. Oh Salvio! I suspect you will be an awful tyrant. Why do I love the prospect of giving myself into your hands chained hand and foot?"

"Because the fire of my love has kindled your own," he answered in a deep, glowing

voice; and he went on with ardour, giving words to his genuine passion, while Terra listened with half-shut eyes and inflated nostrils, her proud and beautiful head leaning against his shoulder. There was no more said at the time about the elopement idea, and their love-making floated back into its old groove.

Two of the three weeks they had to wait before Colonel Fildare could reach England passed in this way without any fresh incident breaking the surface of the pleasant life around. The Count said nothing even to Terra of an indisposition to fall in with the peaceable settlement of the wedding that everyone assumed would take place very soon after the Colonel's arrival. Lady Margreave began even to talk of the guests she would like to have in the house towards a certain period that might become important —say the week after that in which the Colonel was expected. The Count caught some remarks of hers on this subject one afternoon, and fixed his large liquid gaze upon her without making any comment. But on the first opportunity he had of speak-

ing to Terra alone he referred to what had been said.

"My splendid love," he said in his usual grave and passion-thrilled manner, "listen to me. Lady Margreave talks of having guests here for our wedding. She may spare herself that trouble, but I would not tell her this till I had explained to you."

"What do you mean, Salvio?"

"This. I have put up with your father's fancy that my happiness should wait till he should be able to have the amusement of being present at our wedding."

Seeing her troubled look, as though she would have protested had she dared at this way of describing her father's anxiety about her, he answered the look, interrupting his explanation.

"Let us put it that way because in any other it would be less endurable. Shall we assume that your father is coming home uncertain whether he will give his consent, to see whether he likes me for a son-in-law? That would be a position too difficult to bear, and then we should really have to take our

fate into our own hands, and leave all our friends to fret as they pleased."

"You know, Salvio, that nothing can keep me back from you. I am of age, and no authority could prevent me from coming to you when you should call me to be your wife. It is because our position is so strong that we can afford to be forbearing."

"I know; that is all well, and for the reason of what you say I have been patient —strangely patient for me. I have not called upon you to prove your love by coming away with me and trusting me altogether to arrange for our marriage, because I know what the strain would be for you. It would be an agony for you, even though the after reflection that you *had* trusted me—when all should be well—would perhaps have been a compensation. So I have put the idea aside, though I considered it more seriously than you may have imagined."

Terra listened with excitement and heightened colour, but made no attempt to interrupt him, though his slow deliberate speech would have made this easy. He went on—

"I will do nothing to offend your con-

science, even in the sight of your friends who count love for nothing in the relations of men and women, and govern their conduct by rule. But all the same I will not submit, like a clerk waiting his employer's pleasure, to know when it may satisfy your father to permit me to make you my wife. In a few days from now I shall leave Oatfield, and our marriage will not take place here. I shall go to London and make all arrangements for it to take place *there*, in a manner that will not discredit your connexions, nor, what is more important, your own merits and beauty. Within considerable limits you shall fix the time when it is to be, and to the entertainment which I will arrange in London your father shall be free to bring you at the appointed time. On those terms he can be present at our wedding. If he refuses——"

Here he made a long pause and gazed fixedly at Terra.

"What do you mean, if he refuses? Why do you look at me like that?"

There was a touch of her old fierceness of manner in the question; but the fact that it was evoked by the apprehension he had pur-

posely planted in her mind only made it pleasant in his ears. He smiled slightly, drawing her to him and putting one arm round her in the calm consciousness of possession.

"Then the queen of the fête will have to be brought to me by some other befitting protector. Lady Margreave would be more than welcome to me in that character. If she should not be anxious to assume it, I will engage among the great ladies of your London society to find one ready to undertake the charge. All I require is your pledge that in one way or another, when the time arrives, you will come. Yours is the only consent I seek and implore; all others I will constrain or dispense with. Your honour and good name are fully guarded by this arrangement, which also has the merit, as compared with the simpler scheme which Lady Margreave is plotting, of guarding mine."

Terra did not willingly fall in with this strange programme, and pleaded to be spared all the scenes and trials it would give rise to; but her entreaties were of no avail, and her

own pride, working with her love, operated to make her helpless, for she dared not put the matter to a simple issue and decline to be married at all on those terms. She felt that she would be too obstinate to retreat from any position once taken up, and therefore that it would be wisest not to take up a position she did not from the first seriously mean to hold. She was too haughty by natural disposition to cry under the circumstances, and so pledged by many declarations to the principle of merging her own will in that of her chosen master that she was driven to admit that rebellion, even in this case, would be illogical. The conversation ended without any explicit promise of compliance on her part; but the Count did not press her for this, and assumed that his wishes would prevail as a matter of course in the absence of any explicit consent on his part to abandon them.

With Lady Margreave, in the first instance, and afterwards with Sir James, he had conversation of a very different kind.

"The man's pride and arrogance are positively a disease," the generally gentle-natured baronet declared to his wife, when

she told him what the Count had explained to her as the plan he had mapped out.

"Poor Terra!" sighed Lady Margreave, "I am getting frightened to think of the future before her."

Sir James then had a long consultation with the Count, the tone of which was a little strained towards the close. He employed every argument available to show the inconvenience of the proposed arrangement. As Miss Fildare's father was on the point of arriving in England, it was needless for him to do more than discuss the Count's proposals as a friend of both parties. He claimed no authority in the matter; but he represented that Colonel Fildare would certainly not consent to any course of action that put himself and his daughter in a somewhat undignified position—that the Count was practically insisting on a marriage which, if celebrated, would be needlessly surrounded by the atmosphere of a family quarrel, and so forth. If he would only exercise a little forbearance, he could take over his bride under circumstances of general satisfaction with so distinguished an alliance, all of which Sir James

might as well have represented to one of the suits of armour beside the fire-place in his own hall. The Count showed no inclination now to lose his temper; but he was quite immoveable from the position he had taken up. It was Sir James himself whose temper ran the worst risk, this time, of being lost, for his irritation with the Count was really very profound. The resolute Spaniard had inquired towards the close of the conversation if he understood Sir James to mean that Colonel Fildare would be sure to refuse compliance with the London marriage under the conditions proposed. Sir James was careful to guard himself from committing the Colonel in his absence, but gave Count Garciola to understand clearly that, in his own opinion, Colonel Fildare would be about as likely to consent as to become the Count's groom.

"And in the event of his refusal, which you are no doubt quite right in foreseeing, may I fall back on the other plan, which would be so very pleasing to me: that her ladyship, your wife, should escort Miss Fildare to London?"

"In reference to that part of the plan,"

Sir James said rather stiffly, "I need not speak in any ambiguous terms. I could certainly not give my own consent to an intervention on Lady Margreave's part between Miss Fildare and her father, which would be in the nature, in my opinion, of an insult to Colonel Fildare's very legitimate pride."

The Count bowed with gravity.

"In that case," he said, "I see that my views must be reconsidered. I have endeavoured to arrange everything in a way which would respect Miss Fildare's susceptibilities to the utmost; but I am quite resolved that the essential point shall be attained. I will, if you will permit me, confer with her once more, and will then, with profound gratitude for your prolonged hospitality, beg your consent to my departure."

Sir James's instinct of courtesy prevailed for the moment over his smothered displeasure. He assured the Count that their disagreement about the matter they had been talking of need not impair their pleasant relations as host and guest; but the Count only grew more and more grandiosely polite,

and persisted in his request that a carriage might be ordered to take him to the station for a late afternoon express.

Tears forced themselves to Terra's eyes this time, when a little later the Count was alone with her again. The prospect of his abrupt departure was shocking to her in the extreme, and perhaps even more painful than shocking. On his part, he was no longer chilly and formal, as during the interview just concluded, but almost excited, exhilarated by close contact with a crisis even more stimulating than that which he had organized in the first instance.

"The time for compromise and concession —for bending to whims and rules—has gone by, my glorious Terra," he explained with animation. "I do not regret that we are driven now to take our destiny into our own hands, and you will not be sorry for it in the end."

The plan he now unfolded required one desperate act of resolution on Terra's part; all the rest would be made easy for her. There need be nothing which the most fastidious critic of her conduct could call an

elopement; but she must place herself by her own act under the protection of a chaperone, who would be willing to see her safely through an immediate marriage. His peculiar position as a diplomatist, representing a foreign Government, would enable him to circumvent some difficulties which an English subject might have encountered. Money and influence would do the rest; and he undertook that they should be married with all due form in the course of a few days after her arrival in town.

She would have to do nothing more than put herself in the train, and be received, on her arrival in London, by a lady he would enlist in their service. This lady was a Mrs. Waterton, residing in a certain fashionable "Gate," by Hyde Park, whom Terra had no doubt met in society. He would see her directly he got to London; she would herself telegraph and write to Terra, and the young lady had only herself to promise him that she would come with or without the consent of the Margreaves. Of course that would not be given; but it was equally of course that they would not employ physical

force to control her actions. It was only the first wrench of breaking away from them that would cost her an effort; but in achieving this she would at the same time prove to herself and to him the strength of her character and the magnificent reality of her love.

The prospect was frightful to her; but, opposed to all her protestations and entreaties, he only brought forward one argument. The only other course open to her would really be more painful; that would be the course of leaving Oatfield under his protection. He was perfectly ready to carry her off, if she would prefer that; the plan he had devised was merely aimed at sparing her the effort it would be to her to accept this arrangement. He did not in so many words declare that if she refused his terms he would not marry her at all, but this was practically implied in the persistence with which he adhered to the position that beside the two methods of action thus laid before her there was no other that could be entertained.

In the course of the afternoon the Count duly departed, and left Terra with a heart

palpitating from the effects of a tearing process that she found even more agonizing than she expected. Lady Margreave, who spent the afternoon with her in the hope of soothing her agitation—manifestly none the less intense because it was pent up—learned nothing from her concerning the plans for the future which she and the Count had formed, beyond the broad fact that assuredly their engagement was in no way broken off.

"I must say, I do think it is the greatest possible pity that the Count could not make up his mind to be more like other people in this matter," Lady Margreave ventured to suggest, partly in sympathy with Terra and partly from a sense of personal annoyance in the matter.

"I cannot see that it is the Count's fault at all," Terra retorted. "I should not hesitate to blame him, if I did; but papa gave rise to all the trouble, really. It was wholly unnecessary for him to delay the wedding. It is not as if I were a child, and his consent after all more than a matter of sentiment. Then it is not as if there could be any question of doubt as to whether papa would

or would not wish to consent to such a marriage as this. But it is no use talking of it."

Lady Margreave agreed in her own heart to that last view, at all events, and mentally scolded herself for the want of tact she had been guilty of in giving way to a remark, even flavoured with criticism, on the Count in conversation with his devoted bride-elect.

CHAPTER V.

A DESPERATE VENTURE.

Telegrams and letters arrived at Oatfield for Terra in great profusion during the next few days; but she volunteered no confidences concerning their contents. She was more than usually affectionate in her manner towards her aunt; evidently suffering a great deal, but steadfast in her reserve concerning the understanding between herself and the Count which had been established.

Sir James and Lady Margreave agreed in being very sorry for themselves in reference to the disagreeable entanglement in which they were thus involved; but rejoiced in thinking it would be over in a few days, when Colonel Fildare should get home and relieve them of all responsibility in respect to the restive lovers. They did not at first contemplate the possibility of a

further aggravation of the crisis within the short time that remained before the Colonel's return.

The situation was more fully developed the day the Indian mail reached Brindisi. In the morning Lady Margreave received a brief telegram, announcing the traveller's safe arrival on European soil and promising his speedy presence. The message was brief but cheery: just the few words to be expected from a homeward-bound Anglo-Indian in good spirits. But a few hours later Sir James received another telegram, also from the Colonel, begging for a telegraphic reply, to be sent to him to the care of the station-master at Turin, stating whether his injunctions as to the delay of the marriage had been respected, and also whether anything special had occurred in connection with that event.

This message was received about twelve o'clock. Sir James showed it to his wife; but they both agreed that it was not of a kind that could be advantageously shown to Terra. They were profoundly puzzled by it, but could only reply to the effect that the

Colonel's behests had been obeyed, though they had given rise to annoyances too complicated for explanation by wire.

Sir James gave this message, duly enclosed and directed to the nearest telegraphic station, to a servant, mentioning by name one of the men about the stables, who was to be instructed to get ready a dogcart and take it without delay. The order, having been given with this precision, led to the explanation, brought back from the stables, that the particular Henry in question had driven out Miss Fildare in the victoria shortly before.

The resources of the Oatfield establishment were still equal to the emergency. Another man was sent for, and Sir James was not even disturbed by a passing sense of surprise that Terra should have gone out for a morning drive.

It was not till an hour later that Lady Margreave came into the library, where he was sitting, with an open letter in her hand, and her usual dignified composure completely thrown into confusion.

"She's gone off to London, by herself!"

"Good heavens!"

The subject was discussed more fully; but the news which Lady Margreave exploded in the few words set down, and her husband's exclamation, summed up all there was to tell or to say on the matter. The letter Lady Margreave had received had been brought back by the servant who had driven Miss Fildare to the station—the further and more important of the two stations made use of by residents at Oatfield—from which two expresses went to London in the course of the day: one about noon, and the other between five and six in the evening.

Terra wrote briefly, with earnest affection, and imploring Lady Margreave not to think of her unkindly. Her marriage would take place within a few days; meanwhile, she was going on a visit to Mrs. Waterton, of whom Lady Margreave knew, at all events, enough to know that she would be recognised as a decorous chaperone. Everything could be made to seem quite matter-of-course if Lady Margreave pleased. She had slipped away quietly, to avoid painful scenes of parting, and would write again from London.

The situation was calculated to take one's breath away, Sir James recognised, after it had been contemplated in all its bearings, but what was to be done? Nobody was breaking the law—no force could be invoked to prevent Miss Fildare from transferring herself to Durham Gate. It was all most monstrous, and Terra was frightfully to blame, and she might come terribly to grief in the desperate game she was playing—but how could she be stopped? And yet, if nothing were done to stop her, and if Colonel Fildare, as his telegram seemed to imply, was coming home with some clearly defined anxiety in his mind that the marriage should be delayed, what would he say when he learned the alarming news? And the telegram sent to Turin now constituted a most inadequate reply to the inquiry it dealt with. Further despatches had to be prepared for consignment to the care of the station-master at that place, and eventually it became evident that Sir James must himself go to town to meet Colonel Fildare, and spare him what might be the dangerous delay of a needless journey to Oatfield. The whole transaction was terribly troublesome and exasperat-

ing. It would be obvious to the servants that something was seriously wrong; but still it was clear that Sir James had to go. Happily, the large party that had been staying at Oatfield a few weeks previously had dwindled down now to one or two intimates, and the circumstances under which the expected wedding had been dislocated would not, at any rate, be at once proclaimed in private confidences all over the country.

Terra went through many stages of varied distress during the long hours of her lonely journey to town. At intervals she was appalled at the conceivable consequences of the tremendous step she was taking, and impelled to stop and go back at all hazards to Oatfield. Then she would go over the arguments by which she had originally brought herself, or been brought, to take the resolution she was now carrying out, and put all her trust in her lover, feeling that to do anything else would be madness under the circumstances, for it would mean the wreck of her happiness and the utter annihilation of her future life. She might be running some unknown dangers, but should the shadow of

probably unreal perils terrify her to the extent of driving her to choose certain misery instead ?

It was a trial, a frightful trial, her lover had imposed on her. But she was no ordinary, conventional girl ; he was not to be judged by the tame standards of English decorum ; their mutual love was fire of an extraordinary order, that naturally burned in a somewhat unusual way.

The smallest things frightened her most, however ; the too intense glances of a fellow-passenger, left alone with her for a portion of the journey ; his proffer of a newspaper, that she could only decline with frigidity —though fuming with indignation in her heart at the thought that she was in so helpless a position that a stranger could presume to address her. Then there was a little delay at one part of the journey—signals against the train, that really meant no harm, but kept them at a standstill in a cutting, waiting and whistling for ten minutes, during which all the passengers were putting their heads out of the windows and making inquiries, and during which the people in Terra's compartment—

then three or four in number—exchanged remarks about the delay, wondering if there was an accident ahead, and whether it might not be better in that case to stop at Bedford, instead of going on to London that night. One gentleman present had known of a train, under such circumstances, only discharging its passengers in London eight hours after they had been due. Terra, silent in her corner, and a prey to her own reflections, was chilled to the marrow by the prospect thus suggested to her.

Even the ten minutes, however, were caught up in the end, and the train came in, with perfect exactitude, between six and seven. In apprehension, then, as to whether the promised arrangements for her reception would have worked properly, Terra went through a new series of mental agonies. The ghastliness of her fate if she should find no one to meet her, forced her to dwell in imagination on the course she would then have to take; how she would have to drive in a cab to Mrs. Waterton's; how perhaps the "trials" imposed upon her by her lover would *not* really be found to be confined to the horror

of the railway journey, and how perhaps she should only find him waiting for her with some new programme claiming her renewed submission. The strain on her nervous system, well under command as this always was in her case, was very great, and the actual circumstances of her reception a relief to her of proportionate intensity.

Certainly her lover was present on the platform, but not alone. From the miserable helplessness of her journey she was suddenly plunged in the midst of a reception almost royally respectful and reassuring. Mrs. Waterton, a small brunette of animated manner, was present, accompanied by another lady, and attended by a footman from her carriage, waiting to take charge of Terra's *impedimenta*. Count Garciola was himself accompanied by two other gentlemen, both of his own nationality, dressed with extreme precision and finish. The Count received her at the railway carriage-door, the rest of the group collecting at a few paces. His greeting was faultless—the few words spoken a well-spring of passion and delight, but his manner appropriate to the reception of a

princess. As Terra stepped on to the pavement, the two other gentlemen bowed to her, hat in hand, as though she were a queen; and while the footman engaged himself in the but too easy task of collecting her property—for she had but one hand-bag with her—Mrs. Waterton came forward with effusion.

"My *dear* Miss Fildare, it is so sweet of you to come to me. You cannot realize how enchanted I am."

The passengers getting out of the carriage behind Terra wondered what illustrious personage was embodied in the very handsome, certainly, but angry-looking, solitary girl with whom they had been travelling.

"You know Miss Fildare?" said the Count to Mrs. Waterton meanwhile, with stately solemnity, "so I need not present her to you by name. I merely introduce her as a lady who is not only entitled to our utmost consideration on all grounds, but who claims our enthusiasm as a heroine, by her splendid courage—not to speak of my personal devotion."

Mrs. Waterton's carriage was close by—

a large landau. Thither Terra was conducted by the Count on one side and Mrs. Waterton on the other, the rest of the suite behind—so far unnoticed. Mrs. Waterton followed her into the carriage, taking a seat herself with her back to the horses. The other lady then got in, and was pointedly presented *to* Terra—instead of the presentation being put the other way, as the lady's seniority and title might have suggested—as the Marchesa Tortoza.

The Marchesa said a few words, with a gracious bow, in Spanish. Terra, during the last few weeks, had been studying the language, but was not yet sufficiently familiar with it to catch the meaning of what was said. Mrs. Waterton interpreted :

"The Marchesa says she is delighted to be the first Spanish lady introduced to the future Countess Garciola."

The Count meanwhile approached the carriage-door.

"My friends ——," he said, mentioning by name and title the gentlemen with him, "wish to know if they may have the honour of being presented to you, if only for a

moment; of course I will take another opportunity of making them known to you more fully."

Terra was beginning to feel this adulation, welcome as it was after the fears and misery of her journey, an almost too overwhelming reaction. She could hardly command her voice to speak. The Marchesa slipped on to the front seat of the carriage, so as to let her change her place to the corner nearest the door. Terra bowed silently in reply to the Count's inquiry, and he presented the two young men, each of whom kissed her extended hand with easy continental grace. She recalled the Count to her side by a look.

"You will say all that is nice for me, please. I am not quite equal—just now——"

"Of course. You must be tired; and Mrs. Waterton, I know, will take all care of you. I shall come to inquire after you this evening, after dinner; but you must receive me or remain alone, just as you prefer. In any case, I shall see you to-morrow."

He pressed her hand in acknowledgment of their brief parting, and bowed to Mrs. Waterton with a grateful smile.

"Au revoir, dear lady, with a thousand thanks."

Then the carriage door was closed, and they drove off.

"You came just as you are, dear, didn't you?" Mrs. Waterton asked. "You haven't any things you want looked after?"

"I brought nothing," Terra said. "That was the last arrangement."

"Of course it was! So sweet of you to have acted upon it. I should have been frightfully disappointed if you had done otherwise. It would have wasted all my careful preparations; only I felt bound to ask, for fear you should have had anything with you. You might have forgotten it in the excitement, and then we, your faithful servants, might have been taken to task afterwards. What fun it all is!"

"It was such a relief to find you," Terra began; and then her lips quivered, and she was unable for the moment to go on.

"Have a good cry, dear," said Mrs. Waterton cheerfully; "I am sure you must want it. Nothing makes one want to cry

more than excitement; and now we are by ourselves, why shouldn't you ?"

The straightforward simplicity of these counsels, however, made Terra laugh ; and though she wiped her swimming eyes without disguise, the nervous agitation passed away. She was fully mistress of herself again when they got to Durham Gate, and was then at once conducted to her own room —the best guest-chamber in the house—where Mrs. Waterton, bright and animated, and intensely enjoying the originality of the whole situation, explained all her arrangements, introduced Terra to the stock of immediate necessaries that had been got ready for her use, and refreshed her with tea and the influence of her own gay spirit. She had offered to leave her alone to lie down for a while, but Terra declared she had been alone enough all the afternoon in the train, and if Mrs. Waterton could stay and talk to her, would greatly prefer her company.

" If I can ! My dear child, I've got to do exactly as you bid me. We have all sworn oaths of allegiance to you of the most appalling sort. I'm sure the Count will ask you

to-morrow whether you have any complaints to make, and if you have, our lives will not be worth an hour's purchase. But I'm quite a willing devotee. It is the greatest imaginable fun—all the excitement of an elopement, and at the same time nobody can take us into custody. I do not know what people will say, but I am daring by nature, and like to make life a little more piquant than usual. I'm half Spanish, you know, and my good man has mines and estates in Castille and a house of our own in Cordova. I shall look to you to patronise me handsomely when we meet in Madrid, in return for my present services. What a joke it is for Don Garciola to marry after all! You're a wonderful witch!"

After a while a dressmaker in attendance was admitted to an audience, with the view of hastily adapting a costume that had been provisionally got ready for the evening, and then the ladies had yet some further talk. It was very interesting to Terra to hear some account of her lover and his surroundings from the lips of a third person. There were many details about which he had not been

communicative, and she reluctant to question him too closely; but Mrs. Waterton threw floods of light on all the mysteries over which Terra had speculated in every sentence she uttered. The Count had come early into his great inheritance of name and fortune, had been very much his own master from boyhood, had been always a great scapegrace, and not on the best terms with his family, when his father's early and unexpected death, closely followed by that of his elder brother, had invested him with title and estates. He was away somewhere when his father died, Mrs. Waterton believed, but turned up mysteriously soon afterwards Then he developed a great mania for travelling, and never would settle down at home or get married. It was impossible that he could, as a roving bachelor, ever have spent a tithe of his income. He could not but be immensely rich, but, above all things, he was never willing to do anything like anybody else. This queer arrangement about the plan of his marriage was entirely in keeping with his natural manners and customs. If Terra had shrunk from the part imposed upon

her, he would probably have either vanished off the scene altogether, or have done something more violent still. But now that he had got his way, he would simply treat her like all the queens of Europe rolled into one.

Already, as Terra listened to Mrs. Waterton's lively narrative, her life so far, even as passed latterly under the stately shelter of the Margreaves' hospitality, seemed to fade away into an insignificant background, and, with her enthusiasm for the Count inflamed to the utmost by all she heard, she looked back, when left to herself at last to dress for dinner, with terror on the recollection of the doubts by which her own mind had been assailed during the previous few days as to whether she would or would not take the step required from her.

Any danger passed may often seem more alarming in the retrospect than while it is actually confronted, and, when the retrospect shows that it was not fully appreciated at the time, it may seem especially frightful. Terra remembered how her lover had told her that if she would perform the single act of heroism

allotted to her, the rest would be made easy for her; and in the recognition of the completeness with which this part of the promise was being fulfilled she found abundant justification for the entire trust she now reposed in the Count, and for great contrition at the thought of the doubts which had troubled her during her journey.

The hastily adapted costume of black and gold which had been provided for her adornment did no discredit to her glowing beauty. At dinner they were only four, the three ladies—for the Marchesa was staying in the house—and "my good man," as Mrs. Waterton called him—an unobtrusive, middle-aged man, who spoke very little in a quiet voice and took everything as a matter of course. He disappeared after dinner, when the ladies went up to the drawing-room. Very shortly afterwards, for they had not dined till late, Count Garciola joined them. He showed his satisfaction at finding Terra ready to receive him, and not taking refuge in seclusion, by the proud light in his handsome though immobile features, but was at first even more courtly and grandiose in his manner than

usual—in continuation, as it were, of the effect he had prepared at the railway station. Then, in a little while, Mrs. Waterton bore off the Marchesa to her boudoir, opening out of the back drawing-room, with easy badinage declaring that engaged people might be adorable separately, but intolerable together, and left the lovers to each other.

The Count praised Terra for keeping up her courage instead of giving way and shutting herself up.

"You would have been fully excusable this time if you had been upset, but it is all the more splendid of you to have been ready for me this evening."

"The hard part is over for me now, you know. You said the rest should be easy, and I am beginning to see how wise I was to trust you entirely."

Many little points connected with their eccentric programme had been discussed in the notes that had passed between them since the Count left Oatfield, and these were now talked over. Terra was more than ever intoxicated with the delight of being controlled and directed by an authority she

could accept, not only without offence to her *amour propre*, but with a sense of exaltation in obedience. Her lover was at last thoroughly content, and very ardent in his devotion. They spent a glorious evening, and when the Count took his departure, Mrs. Waterton saw Terra to her room and waited on her with a zealous attention that she already began to appreciate as too fitly paying tribute to the dawning glories of her future station, to be in the least degree embarrassing or irksome.

The next day and the day after were spent in preparations for the wedding. Handsome presents of jewellery arrived at intervals, and betrayed the Count's personal intervention in the whole business, but the direction of Terra's miscellaneous shopping was in Mrs. Waterton's hands. She was rather startled at first by the daring disregard of cost which her chaperone urged upon her, but readily persuaded that she would best please the Count by achieving brilliant results rather than by keeping down expenditure. Her lover spent each afternoon in her company, dined at Durham Gate the first evening,

and entertained Mrs. Waterton and herself the second at a club where lady guests were permissible.

On the morning of the third day, with but two more to elapse before the date fixed for the final ceremony, Terra was in her room interviewing a dressmaker, with Mrs. Waterton's maid, and one who had been taken on for her own special service, in attendance, when Mrs. Waterton came in looking rather startled.

"There is some one downstairs in the drawing-room who wants to see you," she said, with a strange intonation in her voice.

"Who is it?"

Mrs. Waterton held a gentleman's card in her hand. She looked up at Terra for a few moments in silence, flicking the card backwards and forwards against her left forefinger.

"Can you guess?"

Terra saw that a situation of importance had arisen, but did not realize what it meant. She held out her hand for the card. Mrs. Waterton, after a moment's hesitation, gave it to her, and she read the name—"Colonel Fildare."

"My father!"

She changed colour a little as she stood with the card in her hand; but an emergency which merely threatened to put her on her mettle was not one of the kind, like the reaction of feeling at the railway station, calculated to overthrow her self-command.

"What would you like to do?" said Mrs. Waterton. "I did not say more than that I would tell you he was here."

"Of course I will go down and see him. I shall be ready in a few minutes."

"Very well," said Mrs. Waterton; "if you want me, ring and send for me."

Before the servants and the dressmaker they could not well discuss the niceties of the crisis. Nothing more was said, and as soon as her dress had been re-arranged Terra went down.

CHAPTER VI.

PATATRAS!

Colonel Fildare was a very well-built, soldierly old man, of middle height and compact figure, bald as to the top of the head, with the hair left to him grey and the full moustache almost white. He was standing on the hearthrug as his daughter came into the room, in a buttoned frock-coat and light gloves—a good-looking old soldier, with much force of character depicted in nose and chin, showing no trace of unusual excitement, though his dark eyes, gleaming below shaggy white eyebrows, always gave his face, in repose, an expression of intensity. Terra and he were well-matched in their dignity and strength. He greeted her without any theatrical display of emotion, either of joy at the sight of her or anger at the peculiar circumstances under which they met. He held

out his hands, into which she put hers, and he kissed her on the cheek.

"Well, Terra my dear, I am glad to see you again."

"I'm glad to see you, papa." After a pause that was only momentary she added, instantly falling in with the attitude of coolness and composure of which he set the example, "I hope you have been having a pleasant journey."

"Well, yes; most of it was pleasant. The last part has been anxious, it is true, but there has been nothing the matter with the trains or the boats."

"I am sorry you have been anxious, but I hope that feeling is over now."

"Well, yes; the worst of it is over. I was afraid of being too late."

Terra seated herself in an easy-chair. The Colonel remained standing.

"Too late for what, papa?" she inquired calmly.

"Too late to—to introduce you to some one you ought to know. And I'm not in a hurry to do that now, for I am afraid it will give you pain."

The answer conveyed nothing to her mind, but was so unlike what she had expected that she opened her eyes widely and looked full in her father's face, with a combative expression, but still a sense of bewilderment, as nothing yet showed her the particular form of attack she was called upon to encounter.

"I do not understand."

"Just so. I don't want to startle you, though you are so courageous. I want you to realize first that I am not come here to fume and make a disturbance, though you have been arranging to carry matters with rather a high hand."

"It was impossible to explain. I have always relied upon your full approval in the end. You could not see at the time how peculiarly unfortunate it was that you insisted on delay. I was sure you would not have done so had you really understood all the circumstances."

"Marriage lasts a long time. It is seldom so unwise as young people may think to be rather deliberate about it in the beginning."

There was a strange tone of reserved

strength about her father's manner that puzzled Terra. He did not seem angry, but he was clearly out of sympathy with her marriage programme, and yet as free from excitement as if he held the command of the situation.

"I am glad to be able to explain all to you, papa. It will take a little time, but I will begin, if you like. You see, as I was old enough to act for myself, I was obliged to decide for myself; I could not think of myself as a child waiting for orders."

"No, my dear, certainly not. You are of age, and your own mistress. That is what frightened me under the circumstances. I thought you might be taking a step of importance without knowing all the reasons *pro* and *con*, and be sorry afterwards."

Terra sighed, as over the weaknesses of human nature exemplified in her father's attitude of mind.

"I do not think I shall be sorry afterwards; but what I cannot at present make out is why you are not delighted with my engagement. When I find my happiness in a marriage of an extraordinarily brilliant

character, one might have expected my friends, and you especially, to be well pleased. Have you imagined that Count Garciola is—how shall I put it?—an adventurer, and not what he seems?"

Terra asked the question in a tone of reserved strength herself this time, and with a comfortable consciousness of the evidence at her command to be had by ringing the bell.

"I never entertained the smallest shadow of a doubt on that subject," said the Colonel, to her surprise.

"Then am I simply crazy, that I can't make out what—why you object, if you do object?"

"Pardon me, my daughter; I have not come here to object. You have reminded me that you are of age, and I should never profess any authority I had no right to enforce. I do not even come to reproach you for having a little upset the Margreaves. You are your own mistress."

Terra did not form into words the inquiry, "Then why have you come?" feeling that it would be rude, and a poor return for her father's submission to the somewhat aggres-

sive declaration of rights on which she had practically entered; but she looked the inquiry in silence, though not without a gleam of affection in her expectant gaze.

"I am come, my daughter," said the Colonel, taking two paces forward, and standing beside her chair, lightly resting one hand upon her shoulder, "to give you a piece of information on which you will be free to act exactly as you choose. But, to begin with, get rid of the idea, if it is in your mind, that I want to tyrannize or constrain you. I couldn't, you know, if I wished to."

"What *do* you mean, papa? Do speak plainly."

"I will; but I never had such a painful duty to discharge in my life. I am making all this delay lest the shock of what I have to say should do you harm. I am what's called breaking something to you."

Terra was gradually feeling unnerved; but she could not escape as yet from the impression that all these strange manœuvres—unexpected as they were—represented some sort of policy directed against her marriage which it was her business to confront and

disarm. She did not attempt to speak, and merely waited for the disclosure.

"There is an obstacle in the way of your marriage with the Count that has no more to do with my fancies on the subject than with the Governor-General of India."

Terra was paling, certainly, but there was a dark, fierce look in her face.

"Terra, my poor girl, you can no more marry Count Garciola than you can marry Sir James Margreave."

"Why?"

"For the same reason. Some one else has been beforehand with you."

Terra leaned back in her chair, and the full meaning of what had just been said came over her soul as with a sensation of physical agony that made her, without consciousness of the action, put up both hands to her bosom. Her father remained standing beside her, looking down on her face as a surgeon might watch a patient, to see if he were giving way under the effects of an operation.

She grew quite pale, and the room swam before her eyes for a moment; but her will

instinctively asserted itself against the inclination to faint, and she recovered self-command enough to say slowly, after a few moments of heavy breathing :

"My father, if you say this without knowing it is true——"

"I should deserve, then," said the Colonel, going on with the sentence she seemed to find it difficult to finish, "that you never spoke to me or looked in my face again."

"And yet it is *impossible*. You are the victim of some frightful deception. You believe it true ; but it cannot be !"

"I said unless I *knew* it to be true you would have the right to refuse ever to see me again."

"If it is true, you must pray God with me that I may die."

"May God strengthen you, my child," said the Colonel solemnly, "to bear this trial !"

"Let me think," Terra said, in a low voice.

Her father drew a chair near hers, and sat down.

Presently Terra spoke again.

"What you have said has nearly killed me; and even if you should be wrong, I shall hardly be the same again. But I know you are saying what you think true—that you are not playing any part. Papa, I unsay one thing I was trying to say just now—what you said for me. Even if you are wrong, I shall be able to forgive the mistake. But do not think I believe it. You must tell me all you know, and then I will see the Count. There shall be no misunderstanding."

The Colonel bowed gravely.

"If you are strong enough, that will perhaps be best; but you are setting yourself a hard task. The facts are these. The Count married when he was a young man, in Seville, before he became the important personage he grew to be afterwards, when his father and elder brother died. The woman was far below him in station, though, of course, very handsome. They lived together for a time on terms that rapidly grew intolerable. In a fit of passion she attempted his life. When he cast her off,

this fact against her—for there were witnesses who but just frustrated her attempt to stab him as he slept—kept her quiet. That is fifteen years ago. He has spent his time since then chiefly abroad; she, with another man of her own class, who has passed as her husband. I have testimony with me that proves all this; I have papers, and I have—the woman!"

Terra shrank at the last word, but uttered no cry. She said calmly, as her father ceased speaking:

"I will hear what the Count has to say. How did you learn all this?"

"I cannot tell you."

Terra looked up in sudden surprise.

"Build no hopes on that," said the Colonel. "There are other secrets mixed up with this. I am bound, in honour, not to reveal them. They do not affect the authenticity of what I have told you. See the Count. Tell him what I have told you—and that I declare myself in a position to prove what I have said."

Mrs. Waterton was sent for at last, and was not a little bewildered by the state in

which she found her guest—looking as though she had gone through a three weeks' illness in the last half hour.

Terra did not pretend that nothing had happened, but begged her to ask no questions for the moment, but to send for Count Garciola: to send an urgent message that would bring him without a moment's loss of time.

"I will wait here till he comes," Terra said, without moving from her chair.

Mrs. Waterton did not dispute the directions given her, but looked with some embarrassment at Colonel Fildare.

"Am I to tell the Count," she asked, "that Colonel Fildare is here?"

"Colonel Fildare," replied the person in question, "will not be here when the Count arrives, so you need say nothing on that head. My daughter wishes to see the Count alone, and I respect her wish. I have to offer you my profound apologies for my intrusion and strange behaviour. That will explain itself later. But it may be that my daughter will want to send for me again after she has seen the Count. May I rely

on your great kindness for the despatch of a messenger to me in that case?"

"Yes; certainly."

"Then I will wait till I hear from you at a place conveniently within call—Bailey's Hotel."

Mrs. Waterton went away to write a note and give her orders to a footman, to seek for the Count, in a hansom, wherever he might be, if not at his own hotel.

Terra begged her father to leave her, and he went. Mrs. Waterton came back to her immediately afterwards, with the double purpose of offering moral support to Miss Fildare after the interview she had evidently found trying, and of ascertaining what line of attack the Colonel had developed, apparently with such remarkable effect. Terra, however, was in a frame of mind very unlike that in which, on the evening of her arrival, she had found relief and pleasure in talking with her hostess. She remained immovable in the chair in which she had received the terrible blow just dealt her, in a condition of lassitude that seemed out of keeping with her usual energetic character. She

made no pretence of disguising the severity of her wound; but she told Mrs. Waterton that she could explain nothing till she had seen the Count. She acknowledged herself to be almost distracted; but conversation would not only be no relief—it would be impossible.

"You shall know all later—or it will not matter; but I *can't* explain."

The effort to speak at all was evidently a strain on her nerves, too great to be borne, almost. In turn, Mrs. Waterton left her to herself.

So, when the Count arrived, which he did after a brief delay, the servant having found him at home, Mrs. Waterton met him in the hall, and beckoned him into her morning-room. He asked what was the matter, with some appearance of anxiety mingled with displeasure.

"Colonel Fildare has been here, and has had an interview with his daughter. She seems strangely overcome; but I do not know what has passed between them."

"Where is he?" asked the Count, with

the displeasure of his tone asserting itself in the ascendant.

"He has gone; but Miss Fildare will say nothing till she has seen you."

The Count said he would go to her at once, inquired where he should find her, and went upstairs.

The white, tearless, but distracted face she turned towards him, as he came in, was startling in its expression, and indicative of some feeling that a mere stormy interview with a despotically-minded father opposed to her wishes could hardly have accounted for in the case of a girl with her unusual strength of character.

"What in heaven's name is the matter?" he began.

"Salvio, I do not believe it!" she answered, with wild fervour. "This is a horrible nightmare! But come and tell me what I have heard is false."

He came up and drew a low chair close to her, and put his arm round her, and kissed her as he took her hand and held it in his own. She did not resist, but did not

respond. She looked in his eyes with a gaze of inquiring terror.

"Now, what is it that you do not believe, but that affects you in this extraordinary manner?"

"They say," said Terra, in a low choking voice, "that you are married already."

The Count gave no melodramatic start, and did not draw away from her altogether, though he drew back a little, nevertheless—still holding her hand. He paused, gazing at her intently for a little interval, during which she looked back still into his eyes in search of the truth, with knitted brow and lips apart.

"You did right not to believe," he said at last.

"But, Salvio, don't torture me! I don't believe, but tell me it is a horrible, baseless story—this cruel falsehood! Who has imposed it on my father?"

"My poor Terra, you have suffered. This story is, as you say, a baseless and a cruel falsehood, so far as it implies that there is any existing bar to our union. I do not know, I cannot guess, the first word of this

mystery—how it has come up in this way to trouble our peace ; but take comfort at once, and know that we can afford both to disregard it utterly."

"Tell me more, Salvio ! tell me everything there is to tell. I have been driven nearly mad. My father talks of proofs, and certainty. But it would be so much easier to die than to believe."

The Count's look darkened, and his voice deepened. As usual, he was deliberate in speaking.

"It is hard on you," he said at last, "that you should be tortured in this way ; but it is hard also on me that I should have to defend myself against nameless and unsupported maligners. I do not know what you have heard ; but I will not let pride stand in the way of trying to restore your peace of mind. It is true that many years ago, when a very young and impulsive man, under strange conditions that do not matter now, I married. This horrible episode in my early life—horrible for many reasons—is completely passed now, and I have desired to treat it as though it had never taken

place, as, indeed, it has never been known, as I thought, to more than a very few persons. Why should you have been called upon to listen to its details, when it is passed, repented of, and done with? The woman is dead."

The manner in which he thus explained the case brought forcibly back to her the manner in which Colonel Fildare had wound up *his* narrative of the same episode: "I have proofs; and I have the woman." If the Count had happened to word his denial of the charge brought against him in some different form, she might not have been stung by the suspicion that now assailed her, and would probably have flung herself sobbing into his arms. As it was, the dry, tearless agony at the heart continued; she remained silent for a while, with the same wild expression as before upon her features.

"The awful horror of such a story as this is that it may be denied—it may be all false—and yet it stands there still before the mind, making the whole of life one fearful spectre."

The Count let go her hand and leaned

back in his chair, moving it as he did so an inch or two away. He said, as it were, with a touch of sternness or loftiness in his tone :

" I begin to fear you have not been wise enough to treat this story really with unbelief, as you told me at first."

" Salvio !" she cried out wildly, " have pity on the terrible position I am in. Help me to see that it is all a cruel falsehood ; but how can I help being in this state of agony ? My father says he has brought the woman with him here to London."

The Count was startled now in earnest, and sprang up in his excitement with a half articulate cry of anger. He advanced a step or two and stood upon the hearthrug.

" Who has dared to plot this against me ?" he exclaimed.

Indignation at the idea of so elaborate an attack would just as easily have explained his words and action as the apprehension of a serious menace under the other hypothesis.

" What am I to do ?—what am I to think ?" Terra moaned.

" I have said that the woman is dead," the Count repeated after an interval, in which

he stood with his clenched hand on the mantelpiece, looking straight before him with knitted brows. He turned towards Terra again as he spoke, and faced her wild stare resolutely.

"Whoever has been brought here—if anyone has really been brought—must therefore be an impostor, bought by some enemy of mine to play this part. I will fathom the mystery. *Your father*, you tell me, has made himself the ally of this plot. I will see him. But Terra——"

There was a kind of warning or menace in the tone with which he pronounced her name, and he paused as if hardly knowing how to frame the thought in his mind into words.

"Well!"

"My love for you seems destined to force me into humiliation. I must know at least that whatever experience of that kind I go through, is compensated for, at all events, by your perfect faith and trust."

"Have I failed in faith and trust?" she cried vehemently. "What would you have me do? Am I not to ask you for the truth

in face of such a dreadful story as I have heard to-day."

"You have questioned me, and I have answered you; and now if you trust me you will refuse to listen to another word on this subject from anyone but myself. Is it not clear that if *I* can see my way to treat this story with contempt, and carry out our marriage in spite of the worst that anyone can say—of the most alarming appearances that can be constructed to annoy and obstruct me—you may be bold also to follow my example? That is what I want you to do, my Terra. I will fight the calumnies that may be brought to bear against me. I will shield you from all knowledge of them, if you will only let yourself be shielded. I will make your life a dream of bliss if you will only be true to your love for me, and listen to no one who would set you against me. Does not every act of my life show how I am devoted to you? But, Terra, there can be no half-hearted devotion on either side in such a love as ours. You should be to me as I would be to you—faithful, even if this false pretender, whoever it may be, really

were the curse of my boyhood come to life again."

He approached her again as he was speaking, and sat again in the chair near her, and would have taken her hand again, but that she had put both up to her face and leaned back with her eyes covered. And yet the wildness and excitement she had displayed at the beginning of the interview were subdued rather than inflamed by the new feeling that was coming over her — a feeling of benumbed hopelessness; a miserable dawning consciousness that all the bright prospects of the future on which her spirits had floated so buoyantly of late were fading away—that the beginning of the end was come—that, somehow, everything in which she had believed and trusted was crumbling beneath her. "If this thing were true!" He could face that as a kind of supposition which required her still to be faithful to him, though marriage in such a case would be a mockery. And this was the union which, in its prospect, had so flattered her pride.

"You can talk about humiliations," she

said, "and yet think I ought to bear such humiliation as that."

He sat upright in his chair, his expression dark and reserved.

"Not even to win back your love, that a few words from your father seem to have driven out of your heart, will I stoop to *prove* myself free to marry you, as I have told you I am. I may prove that to others, if you are strong enough to marry me without wanting such proof."

"Oh, Salvio !" she moaned in a low voice, with her hands still to her face, but turning from him as she spoke and leaning her head sideways on the back of the chair, "that I have loved as I *have* loved ; I would have married *you* if I had had to die the same year for doing so."

She was addressing the ideal in her own heart rather than the living man at her side. He answered her :

"Terra, there need be no thought of dying, but only of living in perfect happiness with me, if you are not mad. I tell you, you only have to face a spectre that will shrink to nothing if you confront it. Why cannot you

be strong to do that, if you love me as you say? You cannot doubt my love for you."

He tried to embrace and draw her to him, but she shrank away and put aside his arms. The act was, as it were, a fatal and decisive turning-point.

"Then you repulse me!" he said in a deep tone that was almost fierce.

She turned round and looked at him across the new and strange barrier she had thus planted between them.

"You tell me I must trust you blindly," she said, "and believe that this story is false, though you yourself talk in this strange way about it—as if it ought not to matter to me, even if it were true. It is not possible for me to feel such trust. Unless you proved to me now that it was false, I should believe that it was true."

He sat silent, with arms folded. There suddenly came upon Terra a sense of shame at the thought of sitting there discussing the position with him any longer, and through the intense misery which possessed her whole being she felt the sting of wounded pride. It nerved her for the practical exertion it was

needful now for her to make. To get away was the problem before her—to get away without breaking down. Not to break down meant not to think, and she stood up with all her life-dream in ruins around her and her consciousness centred on one idea—to go to her father at the hotel close by. She uttered no word of farewell, but went straight out of the room and upstairs to the room she was occupying. It was all strewn with the signs of the dressmaking preparations; but the women who had been in attendance on her when her father came had gone into another room, where their work had been chiefly carried on. She hurriedly put on her hat and mantle and went down, only listening for a moment on the upper landing to be sure that the stairs were clear. A footman who saw her as she reached the hall level hurried forward to open the door for her, looking wonderingly at her as she passed out. She merely shook her head as he asked if she wanted the carriage, and went out into the street. She knew her way to the hotel her father had mentioned, which was very near at hand. As she walked on, anger gathered

at her heart, filling her veins for the moment with the energy of passion. The Count's love for her had been of the kind that was merely a convertible term for his own desire. He had condemned her with cold, cruel resolution to the shame which an ultimate exposure of the dark truth in the background of his life would inevitably have brought upon her. Certainly, he had had the courage to face all risks himself; but these may have been in some way guarded against by the semblance of proof he might have had ready, to make it seem that he had justly imagined the woman dead. As for the state of the facts, it was borne in now on Terra's mind that things were as her father said, and she no longer thought of the accusation as one that was in any way in suspense.

She found her father at the hotel. He got a private room, and asked her no questions till they were secluded there. And it was not necessary for him to ask her questions to learn the broad results of the interview that had just taken place. Indeed, she spoke first when the door was closed—in a hard tone, but making no pretence of disguising the

abject humiliation into which she had been brought.

"I have come away. What do you mean to do with me, papa, since shame and misery will not kill me outright?"

Colonel Fildare's natural habit of mind, fortified by military training, prompted him to feel that in the fitness of things penalties of some sort ought to follow the frightful insubordination of which Terra had been guilty; but, at the same time, the crisis was still very recent and the culprit a beautiful young woman, not to mention her being his daughter. It was not in him to be effusive under the circumstances, but he had no inclination to be severe.

"I mean to take care of you, my dear, of course. We must consider our future plans at leisure. I have not put up here. I spent last night at Sir James Margreave's. He had very kindly come up to town to meet me."

It was an aggravation of Terra's wretchedness to find in this way that, with the best intentions on her father's part, he was a little puzzled what to do with her. It was not to

be assumed as a matter of course under the circumstances that she was free to go back to the Margreaves' house in Park Street—which indeed was not mounted just then to receive anyone, the servants being all in the north. She could not help seeing that already she must have given a great deal of trouble in bringing Sir James hurriedly to town. Colonel Fildare ruminated over the situation without confiding to her the various alternatives he was considering. Eventually he rang the bell and ordered lunch, and a brougham for three o'clock. He had to go back to Sir James Margreave's, he explained, during the afternoon, and it would be better for Terra to drive with him, rather than sit brooding by herself. He could not go immediately, however, for he expected a visitor with whom he had made an appointment. He would secure a room for Terra at the hotel where they were for that night. She was as well there as anywhere else, and the following day they had better go out of town for a bit, say to Bournemouth.

Terra was so bowed down and meek in her misery that he was touched and ready to

forget the trouble and anxiety he had lately been going through on her account, though every now and then surges of resentment assailed him as the further complications of the moment presented themselves. He was alive, however, to the uselessness of attempting any consolation just then. All he suggested in that direction was to the effect that it was a bad time for Terra to go through, but that she had at all events escaped results that might have been worse. He asked her very few questions, and after a while suggested that she could go and rest for a little in her room.

"The visitor I expect," he said, "has to do with your affair; but there is no need for you to be worried about that now."

Terra was willing enough to be alone, and went to her room accordingly, to lie down on the bed and hide her shame-stricken face in the pillows.

Some time elapsed, and then a knock came at her door, followed by her father's voice. He came in at her bidding, after she had got up from the bed and had taken refuge

instinctively in the darkest corner of the small room.

"Perhaps it will be best for you to see my visitor, Terra," the Colonel explained. "It is a lady whom you know."

"It will be dreadful for me to see anyone."

"The lady is Mrs. Malcolm, whom I understand you have met at the Margreaves'. It does not matter now how she comes to have helped me in this delicate matter, but she has helped me in an important way, by looking after a certain person I found a very awkward charge on my hands. Lady Margreave, you know, knows her very intimately. Let that suffice to explain how she comes to be mixed up in this affair. She thinks you must want a female friend at this crisis, and wishes to see you. I hope you will let her come."

Terra was not in a position to dispute such wishes just then, and in this way Mrs. Malcolm shortly replaced the Colonel, who, being thus relieved, arranged to go to Sir James Margreave's by himself, and enjoined the ladies to do justice by themselves to the lunch he had ordered.

No more perfect nurse than Mrs. Malcolm, for a patient in such mental trouble as that from which Terra was suffering, could anywhere have been found. Her grave, earnest sympathy was as soothing as any such external influence could be. Her natural unselfishness made her not only gentle and forbearing, but its subtle radiation exonerated her from all suspicion of holding back unfavourable criticism in the inner recesses of her heart. Terra had been disinclined to say a word about herself at first, or to talk of what had happened; but by slow degrees she was won to be a shade less reticent. She reproached herself bitterly and scornfully for the desperate steps she had taken in defiance of her friends' wishes, and the frightful trouble, annoyance, and inconvenience she had inflicted on everyone round her. This gave Mrs. Malcolm the opportunity of making all this seem light and unimportant. The great thing was that she had been saved. The people belonging to her, who loved her, would be so happy in thinking of that, that they would certainly not remember any personal trouble they had contributed to saving her.

And at last, by making little of everything connected with the matter, except the pain in Terra's own heart, she achieved her great triumph, and brought forth a flood of tears—the first the girl had shed through all the tearing excitement of the morning.

It was long after this event, and when Terra had spoken to her freely, though incoherently enough, of the horror through which she had passed, and of the utter desolation in which she was plunged, that Mrs. Malcolm advanced her benevolent plans another stage. The necessity of seeing about toilet necessaries and clothes led up to this.

Terra was naturally sick with disgust at the notion of having to concern herself with such matters again, considering the very different auspices under which she had been doing the same thing for the previous two days. And then Mrs. Malcolm asked why she should worry herself about such things at all. Let her go back that afternoon with her—Mrs. Malcolm—to Richmond, and stay there till she could get her own things from Oatfield. She was quite alone—her brother away—she had no other guest—and Terra

could be in total seclusion for a few days, till her father has devised some future plans. Of course it was settled on those lines, to Colonel Fildare's immense relief, when he came back in the afternoon. And Terra spent that evening, worn out with suffering, on the sofa, in the drawing-room overlooking the river, where Edith Kinseyle, a few weeks previously, had lain in trance and given the strange news that had provoked such momentous consequences.

CHAPTER VII.

ENGAGED.

Edith Kinseyle had written to Mrs. Malcolm pretty frequently during the interval that had thus elapsed, and her letters, having no character of special confidence, had been sent on to Marston, who had also received some on his own account from the same source. Again at Deerbury Park, Edith had been in the midst of social gaiety, but had not said very much on this subject in her letters, which had been chiefly concerned with the other side of her double life, and occasionally had been brightened by news of fragmentary experiences associated with the new phase of her clairvoyant gifts. She wrote from time to time of having been visited by the appearance she described as "Zephyr," and sometimes he had given her little bits of information, unimportant in themselves, but

none the less interesting under the circumstances, as to Marston's or Mrs. Malcolm's doings at the moment, which she then eagerly sought to verify. She complained to Marston, however, that she did not seem to be getting any further ; that it was very interesting, and very wonderful to be in relation this way with a superhuman being, but after all, when the wonder and novelty wore off, she did not see in what way she was wiser or better for Zephyr's acquaintance, highly as she prized it. Marston had counselled her to demand of her spirit friend, when next he came, that he should procure her visions of the kind she used to have when in trance, but without allowing herself to pass into an unconscious state. In reply, she sent word :

" I got a visit again, last night, from my inattentive and neglectful Master Zephyr, and had my wits sufficiently about me, first of all to scold him roundly for not having been near me for a whole week, and, next, to make the demand you suggested. He took my scolding with the most disrespectful laughter, and as for my request to be enabled

to see the Spirit Queen, he suggested that I had better send first for Queen Victoria, and see if she would come at my bidding. I said he was very rude and unkind, and that I wanted him to help me to be greater and wiser than I was, and not merely to keep me amused. It was very strange, then, what happened. He seemed to recede away to a great distance, but yet to remain plainly visible to me, and then, somehow, to shoot down upon me a ray of something that seemed to pass over my inner senses with a pleasurable, though intoxicating sort of feeling. And then, for the moment, he vanished away altogether. Then immediately afterwards he was in the room again as before. 'Don't you see,' he said, 'it can't be managed at present. But I'll show you some pictures.' And then he began making dissolving views in the air before me—or somehow, in my own fancy, I seemed to see them in the air before me. I saw myself, first of all—looking like a fly in amber—inside a great block of glass or crystal, and *you* were in the picture too, on the outside of the glass prison, sweeping your hands against it. I did not seem to pay

any attention, but as the scene changed I saw myself flying away like a sort of butterfly out of a chrysalis, while you were lying pale and motionless amongst broken fragments of the glass, or ice, or whatever it was, far below. It did not seem to disturb me in the least to see you in this unhappy plight, though you looked as if you might be dead. Then Mr. Zephyr put the *dramatis personæ* of his show in quite another position, and I saw myself, as it were, coming down a mountain path, with cloud above, going onwards towards a glorious and beautiful sunlighted valley, while you were standing far behind me, higher up on the same path, separated from me by the cloud, looking very dignified and imposing, and holding what looked, at first, like a portrait of me, but what I saw then was a looking-glass which reflected me as I walked below (in spite of the cloud). This picture seemed to give me a most uncomfortable feeling, though I had not been in the least distressed by the other, in which you seemed to be dead! Whether Zephyr intended to imply by all this that I was a perfectly heartless and selfish person, or what, I don't know.

I suspect he meant something uncivil, for, as I tell you, he was not at all in a respectful mood."

Some time elapsed after this letter came before any further despatches were received from Deerbury Park, either at Richmond or the Temple. Then Mrs. Malcolm had a letter which came to her a few days after Terra Fildare's arrival on the scene. She did not send this letter on to Marston, but wrote to him, suggesting that he should come over and see her.

He went to Richmond in the course of the afternoon, and found Mrs. Malcolm alone in the drawing-room to receive him.

"You are not looking well," Mrs. Malcolm said directly after her greetings.

"I'm not feeling so especially; but there's nothing specially the matter."

"I have had a letter from Edith," she went on, "but I so much wanted to talk it over with you that I asked you to come down instead of sending it."

As she put the letter in his hands while speaking, he did not ask, as her manner might otherwise have suggested, whether there was

anything the matter, but read it without a word.

Edith had written :

"My dearest Marian,

"I've been in a whirl, and I haven't written to you for ever so long—a week or ten days. My excuses are manifold and all-sufficient. First of all, I can hardly get a moment to myself, in view of the claims made on my time by my future husband! There is the great news launched. I have been paired off by my destinies and my friends with Colonel Danby, of whom I have often spoken to you. Everyone congratulates me, and tells me that a brilliant and delightful future is in store for me. All these good wishes will count for nothing unless I have yours, so write to me *at once*, and say everything you can imagine that is sweet and exhilarating. But my affairs are much more complicated than they will seem to you so far. My friends have been making frightful discoveries about me. I have got nothing worth speaking of in the way of a left lung. There was a great London doctor

here, on a visit for a few days, who found me out. I do not feel in the least little bit unwell, but I am decided to be absolutely unsound; what you would call in a horse 'hopelessly screwed.' Naturally you will say, under these circumstances, Colonel Danby ought to be let off his bargain; but he actually made the bargain with his eyes open. The doctor says I most certainly ought to go to Algiers for the winter, before the weather should turn in the least cold; and it was this very remark that led to his proposal that he should take me. So the programme is that we are to be married from here about the end of September, and then fly to the south."

She went into some further detail, and discussed the possibility that she might somehow contrive to see Mrs. Malcolm before "the fatal event." She might have to come to town to do some shopping. And she asked Mrs. Malcolm to give news of her to Mr. Marston, for whom, for the moment, she had no news "of more worthy matters," nothing occult having happened to her since the night of the pictures.

Marston folded up the letter when he had finished it, and sat turning it in his fingers, without making any immediate comment. Mrs. Malcolm, in the corner of the sofa, went on with some knitting on which she was employed. With her, knitting was, in a measure, an act of consideration for the people with her at any time. It seemed to justify them for not speaking if they did not want to, though it always subsided into her lap, and was effaced by other interests, when conversation began.

"So," Marston said at last, "that was inevitable, I suppose. But it has happened soon—very soon."

"The discovery about her lungs is what we were warned about."

"We are so blind and helpless in this life," Marston dreamily said, after a further pause; "and those who feel blindest because they realize what might be known, are the few who know perhaps a little more than their fellows."

"What do you mean, more exactly?"

"I mean that it is so difficult to know what the whole situation means—what is for

the best. Should one wish that she might live—or, knowing what she really is, might there not be the truest wisdom in holding back that wish?"

"We could not contemplate her death without great wretchedness."

"Language is weak. If I say, What does one's self matter?—I am pretending to arrogate to myself an unselfishness superior to yours, which would be absurd. You would sorrow to lose her in a pure, unselfish way. For me——"

"You would sorrow more."

"I should sorrow more—well, yes, perhaps I should; but the sorrow then would hardly add an appreciable pain to what I must feel in any case. That is the normal condition of things. Fate has put me in contact with her just enough to make me love her, so that the thought of her blots out every other idea that life can suggest, but necessarily leaves me there. And that being so, it is a kind of painting on the lily in an inverted sort of way, to say that anything else can cause me sorrow. You love her with a perfectly beautiful and unselfish feeling. And I—well, I

may most honestly say I do not love her in a selfish way; but I cannot help loving her in a self-regarding way."

"According to what was said, you might have won her in spite of everything. I do not understand that, Sidney. What did it mean? These things are never said idly; but I do not see how this could have been averted by us, even if it had been right for us to avert it. Can there be any further complications pending? Will this marriage, do you think, be broken off?"

"I should not think so."

"But then——"

"You will see, if you think," said Marston. "The time has gone by during which I might, in the words spoken through her, have chained her life to mine——"

"How? You have had no opportunity. But, ah! do you mean——"

"I mean, of course, that, after all that went on here, and after the extraordinarily close mesmeric relation there was between us, made a thousand-fold stronger than it would have been otherwise by my intense love for her, I could have made *this*," holding

up the letter, "utterly impossible long ago, had I striven to do so. You will feel that no mighty invocation of magic would have been needed for me to have filled her with such an intense desire to come back here, that she would have come back before now; when everything else might have followed."

"I see. And you would bring no influences of that sort to bear upon her?"

"Assuredly not. Would it not have been base to do so?—no matter how I might have worshipped her,—if it had been conceivable that she could have made such a sacrifice."

"How little the world at large understands the ebb and flow of events."

"It has been hard, sometimes," Marston said, "*not* to long for her in the way that would have been an active force."

"Certainly I do not think you need blame your feeling for her as selfish."

"That's what I say; but it's complicated. I knew something of this sort must come; but it has come soon. I thought we might have had her as she was for a little longer; and now there is the dreadful complication about

her health—her life. What ought we to wish for—for her sake? And we are so blind."

"There is not much responsibility involved in wishing," Mrs. Malcolm said. "So, at all events, I wish she may recover and get strong. If that is possible, it is the plain law of life that we should keep people living with us as long as we can. Besides, in the chances of life, while she lives, we may always see something of her from time to time."

Marston still pondered on the ideas in his mind, and merely suggested, in reply to the last sentence:

"Unless we escape ourselves."

"Don't be morbid."

"How strong the influence of habit is even on your strong nature, Marian. Provided I do not make the mistake of trying a short cut, by which I should probably lose my way, how can anything be less morbid, how can anything be more rational and cheerful, than for a man who cannot see his way to being happy in this life, to look forward eagerly to the next, and speak of such

eagerness openly and frankly? If we were honest in our professed beliefs, should not we say sometimes to one another, as we meet: 'I'm very sorry to see you. I hoped, for your sake, you were dead!'"

"That seems intellectually true; but one's instinct against it may be born of a higher intuition."

Their talk wandered off for awhile into problems of this nature, and then came back to practicalities in regard to Miss Fildare, whose final adventures Mrs. Malcolm recounted; though she had told Marston before, by letter, of her break off with the Count, and her arrival in Richmond. Of course, both Mrs. Malcolm and, through her, Marston had been apprised by Ferrars, during his operations on the Continent, of the various circumstances connected with his enterprise—of the difficulties he had found in his way, to begin with, overcome in the end by money and resolution; of his journey to Brindisi, the only place at which he could be sure of intercepting Colonel Fildare; and finally of his return to the Hague, leaving the woman he had brought from Spain in

the Colonel's care. Mrs. Malcolm had been instructed to meet the Colonel on his arrival, and provide for the accommodation of the important witness. Knowing the very headstrong character of his daughter, and over-estimating, as events turned out, the danger that she might simply refuse to listen to an extravagant story, unsupported by adequate proof, the Colonel had conceived it all-important to keep the heroine from Seville within easy reach.

Terra herself did not come down while Marston remained with Mrs. Malcolm.

"I might as well merely have sent you the letter, after all, perhaps," she said at last, when he was going. "There seems nothing for us to do in the matter. I was wrong, perhaps, to give you the trouble of coming for nothing."

"Your perfect sympathy made you wish to be present when I got this news; and in sending for me you did a kindness, as you always do."

"I wanted your advice, however. I should like to see her again, of course, if she comes to London, as she says. But whether

to press her to come here again or not, supposing she is able, I could not determine."

Marston thought for awhile, and then:

"I think it would be very desirable to ask her here again. Physically, I can do her good, I know. I could see her in peace for a little time nowhere so conveniently as here."

Mrs. Malcolm said she would try; and then, as they were parting, said she was sorry to see him looking so wretchedly ill.

"I am afraid that all you have heard today will not serve to revive you."

"You will cling to your theory that physical life is a blessing?" he said, with a smile.

"I am quite sure it is a duty we owe one another to preserve it *for* each other, at any rate; and if you let yourself run down too much, you will give me the trouble of coming up to the Temple to nurse you."

"I shall not forget what you say. Perhaps it is a duty we owe one another. But you shall not be taxed in even your overflowing kindness to nurse me. That will not be necessary, you will find."

He spoke almost as if there were some significance in his words beyond their literal meaning; but at the time she did not realize what this might be.

Letters of congratulation went to Edith by that evening's post both from Mrs. Malcolm and from Marston. He wrote to her cheerfully about her health. He felt sure, he represented, that it was by virtue of a sound instinct or "intuition" of her own that she herself was so cheerful on that subject. Her organism was probably of a kind that would disconcert the experience of a doctor used only to the ordinary phenomena of physical life. She might be flying, so to speak, on a crippled wing, but might have so strong a natural affinity with the upper regions of the air as to be secure from all danger of falling.

"That is perhaps a clumsy metaphor," the letter went on, "and no illustration I can think of just now exactly fits the case, but the sources of your vitality are not the same as those which feed the life of more commonplace people—of that you may, if you please, safely trust me to know more than I can quite fully explain. Assuming, therefore,

that you are in no peril, even by reason of the great doctor's discoveries in the region of your left lung, you will permit me, I hope, to offer you all the best wishes at this crisis of your life that can be framed by the truest and deepest imaginable friendship. I will not disguise from you the disappointment I feel at the thought that I am not likely now to have any further opportunity of watching the development of your higher attributes. I have never disguised from you the reverence and enthusiasm on my part which the contemplation of them has excited, but you will realize without an effort that if this new relationship that you have entered into is to be for your happiness there can be no feeling concerning it in the breast of so true a friend as I humbly claim to be, which is worth talking about in presence of the dominant feeling —that of gladness with you for your sake. Life is a great mystery, even for those of us who fancy we know a little more about it than the majority of mankind. As we come to comprehend something about the higher complexities of our nature, we can never look at even the lower events of physical existence

without some reference to these. But it is so difficult to fit all considerations perceptible from this higher point of view properly into their places. As the circle of knowledge widens the horizon of ignorance expands, for there is infinity in all directions, and only the most narrow-minded observer thinks he can explain the whole. The upshot of which is, that though I look upon you as quite fit, so to speak, for what we call heaven, and though I certainly think heaven a better place of residence than earth, my philosophy comes to an abrupt end in presence of the simple earthly fact of your engagement, and I can only retire back into my own den with my futile conjurations and studies, and trust in the hallowed formula of the fairy stories, that you may live happily ever after."

It remained uncertain for a week or two longer whether Edith would be able to pay Mrs. Malcolm another visit before her marriage, and in the interim Terra Fildare had tided over the most difficult time connected with her trouble, not merely in so far as its most emotional aspect was concerned, but in regard to the petty embarrassments about

her wardrobe and personal properties generally. Her complete seclusion at Richmond enabled her to carry on for a few days with things lent her by Mrs. Malcolm, and then her own luggage, packed under the direction of Lady Margreave, was sent on from Oatfield. Little or nothing was said during her stay at Richmond concerning George Ferrars Mrs. Malcolm faithfully reported all that had transpired to the Hague, and did not try to mould her brother's destiny. Obviously it would be premature to raise any question of that sort now, and Mrs. Malcolm was content with having done the right and serviceable thing at the right time, leaving subsequent events to the guidance of the persons chiefly concerned. Terra was meanwhile sincerely grateful, as also was the Colonel her father, who had been spared the trying duty of wearing down the first sharp edge of his daughter's grief. He had written to Mrs. Malcolm proposing to come to town —he had returned to Oatfield in the first instance with Sir James Margreave—and resume possession of Terra, with a view of taking her abroad for a continental tour; but

Mrs. Malcolm had pressed her to stay, and her own inclinations were strongly in favour of that arrangement. Mrs. Malcolm's soothing and unobtrusive sympathy and companionship were far more acceptable to her just then than her father's company, and the Colonel, for his part, had been easily persuaded that it would be best for his daughter to stay on quietly where she was, rather than undertake a tour she could hardly, under the circumstances, be expected to enjoy. So her Richmond visit was indefinitely prolonged. At last a little opening appeared in the clouds, which seemed at one time to bar out all prospect of a visit from Edith. It was considered necessary by her friends that the best medical skill available in London must pronounce upon her case before the arrangements for the winter were definitely selected among the various possibilities suggested by an anxious bridegroom with an ample purse. She was to be brought up to town, she wrote, under befitting chaperonage, and lodged for a day or two at Claridge's—or rather, that had been the idea at first, the Miltenhams' town house at that season of the year being very

much dismounted; but Edith had "moved for leave to bring in an amendment," as she expressed the matter in her explanatory note, rather mixing up some of the parliamentary talk she heard going on around her. She had suggested that she would bid adieu to her girlhood by paying a short visit to her friend of friends, Mrs. Malcolm, and with the advantages belonging to her position had carried her point. "The opposition saw I really meant it," she wrote, "and discreetly gave way."

So one day in the early part of September it came to pass that, having been duly surveyed by her battery of doctors at Brook Street, she was delivered over with much ceremony, and gallant protestations from Colonel Danby concerning the magnitude of the trust, to the custody of Mrs. Malcolm, who came up to town to meet her. Her leave of absence was to cover three days. Colonel Danby had a short conversation with Mrs. Malcolm concerning her apart from the others who were present.

"The verdict about Miss Kinseyle," he said, "seems to be contradictory in some

respects. There is a great deal of organic disorder, but a great reserve of general strength in her constitution. From a mere examination of her lungs the doctors would have expected her to have been much less healthy and vigorous generally than she seems. The inference would be that the organic attack, though no attention has been paid to it hitherto, has been defeated by Nature, and does not threaten further development. But under the circumstances, it is needless to say that the utmost possible care must be taken to guard our patient from its renewal."

Edith herself laughed and joked with Mrs. Malcolm on their way down to Richmond about the solemnity with which she had been inspected. She did not feel ill in any way whatever—had never felt better or stronger than during the last few weeks, and the new theory that she was a very fragile invalid, requiring to be surrounded with elaborate precautions, seemed merely part of the fuss incidental to her engagement. It gave Colonel Danby a great deal of innocent amusement to lay out a plan of compaign against the unfelt foe

supposed to be conspiring against her welfare. The Riviera was their first line of defence, and Algiers their citadel. They were to keep several steamboats ready saddled at Nice, and watch their enemy through stethoscopes. At the first cough they would slip across the Mediterranean, and a serious cold would involve a strategic movement on Madeira. She was in mortal terror lest some medical authority should declare a hearty laugh too great a strain on her system, in which case she would be condemned to read sermons and serious poetry for the whole of the honeymoon. Certainly it was immensely devoted of Colonel Danby to make her health in this way his main preoccupation, but if she was obliged to pose as an invalid for the whole winter, she would have to try a low diet, and be bled at intervals to cultivate an appearance befitting the part.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIST CLEARING.

Mrs. Malcolm had already explained by letter the circumstances under which Terra Fildare was then staying with her. They would be a square party for dinner that evening, she now told Edith, for she had laid on Sidney Marston for the service of any psychic emergencies that might arise during Edith's short stay. When he came, towards dinner-time, Edith greeted him with a sympathetic smile, and said it was delightful to be all three "as they were" again. The excitement of the moment obliterated all traces of the worn and weary look that Mrs. Malcolm had taxed him with at their last interview.

"And you are so little changed to look at," he said to Edith, "that it seems difficult to realize the great change that has really taken place."

"How did you expect me to be transmuted? Ought I to show myself crushed by the burden of care so soon? At all events I have come down to Richmond to throw it off for three days."

Marston was constrained and awkwardly silent at first. Mrs. Malcolm focussed their talk after a little while on the old topics that used to engage them formerly.

"I have been out of your world down here," she explained, in reference to some incidents connected with people Edith thought she knew, to which allusion had been made, "and have been quite content with Terra's companionship. Besides, I have been most interested,—in getting your letters,—in what you have told me of your psychic adventures."

"I haven't been having any lately. Zephyr has been a faithless friend, and has altogether deserted me. I am beginning to think he is a poor substitute for my old trances—with Mr. Marston at hand to make me remember all the nicest parts. I think we must celebrate this happy reunion by having some more. But Miss Fildare will

be wondering what on earth I am talking about."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Malcolm. "I have told her quite enough of what used to go on here to prepare her for anything that may take place."

"I had no idea that you were so—wonderful a person when we were together at the Margreaves'," Terra said.

"Oh, *please* don't look upon me as anything of the kind. Mr. Marston is the magician, and I am only a sort of instrument for him to play upon."

"History repeats itself," said Marston, replying to Edith's last remarks, "according to the current phrase, but not in the narrower cycle of private lives, I fear."

"I do not seem as if we had ever left off from the point of view of this my own old sofa corner. Marian, I am glad you are not given to hunting your furniture about the room. I would never have forgiven you if this sofa had not been exactly where I have been used to find it."

"I wonder if its magic still survives," said Mrs. Malcolm. "How do you think, Sidney?"

"I should think Miss Kinseyle is about as likely to have lost her psychic attributes as Joachim to have forgotten the violin in the last few weeks."

"Or Mr. Marston to have lost the art of paying compliments," added the young lady herself. "But that habit is too deeply engrained to serve as an example for me. Perhaps I have merged myself altogether in my commonplace aspect since we last met. Perhaps, as Mrs. Graham Lee used to put it—don't you remember?—I shouldn't mesmerise now, even if I were tried."

"I think," said Mrs. Malcolm, "that the temptation to try will get very serious after dinner."

Marston did not warmly endorse the proposal; but as he had never been in the habit of attempting to impress his wishes on their arrangements in the former time—content to direct the actual course of the mesmeric processes when these had been decided on or demanded by the ladies—his passivity in the matter now did not strike them as remarkable. They went in shortly afterwards to dinner, and the little ceremony passed over

without any special incident. Terra, indeed, had been troubled with an uncomfortable feeling—as the conversation reverted from time to time to the psychic mysteries with which she was quite unfamiliar—to the effect that perhaps she would be in the way, and had indicated a readiness to take herself off into privacy when dinner should be over; but Mrs. Malcolm had declared this wholly unnecessary.

"I do not treat you ceremoniously, my dear, by interrupting our talk to try and explain things to you. But do you, on the other hand, spare us the feeling of being rude by remaining quite at ease yourself. I am specially pleased to have you here while Edith is with us."

In the drawing-room afterwards she again reverted to the idea which possessed her imagination.

'Well, what are we going to do this evening? It is very nice to have you here, Edith, and chatter idly as we have been doing, but the combination seems to suggest something more."

"What does the master of the ceremonies say?" inquired Edith.

"He is the servant of the ceremonies, if you please."

"But why are you not eager to renew our old proceedings, Sidney, if you are really disinclined, as it seems to me?"

"Disinclined is certainly not the right word. It is more fascinating to me than I can say to watch Miss Kinseyle's psychic flights at any time, and it would be rather more so than usual to-night. I merely wonder if you recollect that the counsels given through her in her last trance were against repeating the process in the old way."

"I should think," Edith said, "that the orders were not intended to operate for ever. There has been a long interval."

"It was left to your discretion, if I remember rightly," said Mrs. Malcolm. "Was not that so?"

"Yes; I think it was so left, and that is what makes me so cautious. I can't see my way through it quite. I can't see any reason why it could possibly do harm, but there must have been some reason in the warning."

"Suppose we try," Edith suggested, "and then if I go black in the face, or begin to scream, you can call me back. I can't feel frightened of anything in this dear old sofa corner, and with you at hand to take care of me."

"Then let us try," Marston said; "perhaps it is only a superstitious reverence I entertain for a warning your lips have spoken. It may be that your impulse and Mrs. Malcolm's are better entitled to be trusted than mine. Besides, I am not sure but that my impulse is in the same direction now."

There were no preparations needed beyond the simple movement of his chair a pace or two forward, but a great deal seemed embodied in the fact that Edith should again put her hands in his, going back across the memories of the painful scene they had passed through in that room on the last evening of her former visit, to the earlier time of their first acquaintance. There was no mystery between them now. The dark horror in his life had been disclosed and shuddered over, and a little interval had smoothed down the storm of emotions thus evoked. She knew

now all that there was to know about him, and resumed their sympathetic intimacy on its old footing. And yet, as he took her hands, he noticed some costly rings upon them that had not been there before, and the meaning of the shining symbols stung through and through his imagination as it were, and left a physical sensation in the track of their rays. He said no word about them, and did not even look at them, but in a little while she drew away her hands and took off the rings.

"Take care of them for me, Marian. They seem to me somehow in the way. That will be better," as she restored her hands to Marston's keeping, and looked up in his face with a smile.

"Is it fancy, I wonder," she said soon afterwards, "or do I see a kind of cloudy light floating about between us?"

"I suppose you see something. Could you lower the light, Mrs. Malcolm? She might make out more clearly then."

Some candles that stood upon the mantelpiece had been already blown out so that they might not glare in Edith's eyes, but a lamp was burning on a table behind her.

Mrs. Malcolm went to this, turned it down as low as it would go without being quite extinguished, and put a shade over it.

"Oh yes!" Edith cried, "I do see a light. Don't you, Marian?"

Mrs. Malcolm saw nothing distinctly. Marston, appealed to in turn, said he did not see, but felt an influence which might be what Miss Kinseyle saw.

"It seems to flow from your side and move round towards me in eddies. And there is light round your hands, too! Hold away your hand for a moment. Yes, like that," as he held it pointing towards her. "There is light coming from the tips of the fingers."

As her eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness she was able to observe these effects more distinctly, and described the colour of the light she saw as a purplish-blue. Then, by her wish, Marston stood up, and moved a little away from her.

"That's very curious," she said. "I can still see the light, and it still flows from you to me, but as you draw away the cloud grows more like a current or band. Get away now

into quite the far corner of the room. There, that is still just as plain as ever."

"I dare say I can tell you when it looks most distinct to you," Marston said, as he leaned against the wall at the side of the room farthest from her sofa. "Wait a few moments. . . . Now!"

"Yes; I distinctly saw the light brighten. A sort of pulsation passed through it."

"That is the mesmeric, or magnetic force, no doubt, which you, as a sensitive, are conscious of. I know when it goes out towards you by my own sensations."

"I'm beginning to understand things," she said dreamily, in the influence of that light. "Come back again now."

She remained thoughtful and quiet as he sat down again beside her.

"You need not take any trouble in the matter. You are magnetising me all the time."

"I know."

"Do my forehead a little, though; perhaps it will make me see clearer."

Marston laid his hands on her head, and made a few passes of the kind that had

generally before sent her off to sleep. And, indeed, this time again it seemed as if the usual effect had been produced. She lay with her head back upon the pillows for a minute or so in silence, sighed a little, and then said :

" It's draining your life away."

" What then ?" said Marston.

" That has been going on some time. You have been forcing the current to flow—it is not merely that I have been absorbing it. That is why I have been feeling so strong and well. I ought to have been nearly dead by this time, if I had been left to myself."

Marston made no comments on these calmly uttered assertions, which were put forward in a subdued voice, sentence by sentence, and slowly. Presently Edith resumed :

' I can see the feeling that has governed you. You have not been trying to draw me towards you. You have not wanted any reward, but you have so arranged things that your vital strength is all draining away, to make me strong at your cost."

" And is not that a very good arrange-

ment? I do not want strength, and you do."

"I cannot accept the sacrifice—knowing all it means."

"Then let what you are saying be wiped off your physical memory, so that you will not recollect it when you wake."

She made no direct reply to, or acknowledgment of, this injunction.

"It is not of any permanent use, after all," she went on. "This influence is preventing the effect of my illness from showing itself; but the causes are going on all the while. The doctors are mistaken in thinking they have been stopped. It will require a stronger influence than anything you have yet been able to do to save my lungs altogether from getting worse."

"A stronger influence, you mean, than anything I have been able to do yet; but it might be possible for me to accomplish what is needed—by a final effort."

She remained silent for a little while, and then, still speaking in the same calm and unimpassioned tone as before, answered:

"Yes; I must answer you truly. You

have penetrated some great mysteries, and learned to understand some part of the power controlled by self-sacrificing love. But you do not know all that your own project will accomplish. You cannot know all the risks."

"Are not we bound to do all we can for one another?"

"Not bound to do what you want to do for me."

"If not bound, at least permitted?"

"It is never right to waste power obtained at such a sacrifice. It may be that the knowledge I have acquired to-night as to the nature of the sacrifice you are trying to make for me will defeat your own intention. Already that purpose, as far as you have already carried it, has been imperilled. It was dangerous to let me learn so much."

Marston looked towards Mrs. Malcolm, though the darkness was too nearly complete to let them see each other's faces.

"This was the meaning of the warning against another trance," he said to her in a low voice.

"Try and turn her on to something else."

"There is something else," Edith said, answering the suggestion herself, "going on all the while. Don't you see it, Marian?"

Hitherto in her trances she had been apparently unconscious of any voice but Marston's. Her response, in this way, to Mrs. Malcolm's remark was a novelty.

"I only feel an emotion, dear. My Guardian's magnetism is all about us."

"Come and take my hand, and look straight before you with me."

Mrs. Malcolm came to the back of the sofa, and, kneeling there with her arms on the low back, took one of Edith's hands. After a time she gave a low murmur as of admiration and awe.

"Yes; I can see her faintly through the darkness, as though at a great distance."

"She says, so kindly and sweetly, that she is not so far from us as we are from her. That sounds a paradox; but she means that we do not yet realize how near she is to us, so she seems far to our eyes."

"Does she seem far off to you also?"

"Yes; not as I have seen her before, when my body has been completely en-

tranced. But then I was drawn to her by her power. It is different now. But it only makes me wish to feel as I used to with her. I do not see and feel to-night as I have done before; but I understand things better. Oh, everything else does seem so poor and worthless, compared to the glory and joy of being away there with her in the state she is in. Nobody would live in the body, if they knew what it was to live in the world of spirit. And yet it is not merely by quitting the body that we can reach the world of spirit. People who cling to physical life do so with wisdom very often; though they do not know why they are wise. They would be very foolish if what they believe was really as they believe it. One must never hasten the change."

"Not even for you, then," said Marston, "would it be wise to hasten the change."

"Certainly it would not be wise to hasten the change. Why do you ask me questions I am bound to answer, but also bound to leave only half answered?"

"I must ask you what arises in my heart to ask you. I am willing to listen to any-

thing you have to say to me beyond the direct answer."

"Why are you talking with her in riddles?" said Mrs. Malcolm. "You seem to understand each other, but I cannot follow you."

"Do you ask me questions, Marian," Edith said in reply, "and I shall perhaps be able to answer more plainly to-night than usual. But ask me about the things of the spirit life. It seems a kind of blasphemy to talk of anything else when *her* influence is upon me."

"But there is one thing I want to know, that it cannot be wrong to be anxious about. Are we going to lose you, dear, or to keep you with us?"

"You will never lose me, Marian. We shall be more closely united hereafter than we ever have been, or can be, amid the barriers and changes of life in the body."

"That does not seem to answer what I was anxious about for the moment. I can't help thinking selfishly of the present, though I would be reconciled even to losing you, if you say distinctly it is best for you."

"Wait and see. I cannot tell you which is best now."

The strange conversation was prolonged for a considerable time, Mrs. Malcolm obeying the injunction to press no further for definite information about Edith's prospects of life, and asking questions relating to her own past experiences in relation with the Spirit Edith described herself as interpreting. When at last Mrs. Malcolm, speaking to Marston, asked if he did not think Edith ought to be brought back to consciousness, they were made fully aware of the fact —already suspected from the course the proceedings had taken — that this time she had never properly lost consciousness.

"You need not make any efforts to bring me back," Edith said. "I have never been away. I know this time all that has taken place."

"You remember all your talk with Mrs. Malcolm, and how it began?" asked Marston.

"And also my talk with you, which came first. You can only keep away from my

physical recollection what has never been established there."

Marston was silent. She spoke in a significant tone, but very gently and sympathetically.

"You might turn the lamp up a very little," she went on; "and then by degrees I shall feel as usual again. I am rather languid at present."

They did as she suggested, and discussed the new phase on which her faculties had thus entered, at length, in all the bearings it suggested. Then, as their eyes grew used to the light, the room was restored to its ordinary condition.

All the evening, however, Edith remained in a rather dazed and dreamy condition, and spoke of feeling weak and exhausted, as she had never felt before after one of her trances.

"I am not free from self-reproach in all this," Marston said. "I fear I ought never to have agreed to attempt another trance. It seems almost to have done you harm, and —perhaps—has worried you needlessly with some fancies."

"I do not regret what has happened," said Edith. "Not at all. It has been wonderfully instructive. Perhaps a little sobering for the moment, it is true. That may be all for the best. Meanwhile, self-reproach under the circumstances does *not* seem to me quite the right feeling for *you* to be troubled with."

It was not till after Marston had gone that Terra Fildare joined again in the conversation.

"How good you have been, dear," Mrs. Malcolm said to her, "to sit quiet and self-effaced the whole evening. So much that we have been talking about must have seemed quite unmeaning to you."

"I have not understood it," Terra said; "but that only makes it stranger that I should have been so impressed."

"How have you been impressed?"

"I can't describe. Awestricken, somehow. It seemed so thrilling that you and Miss Kinseyle should have been seeing something that I could not see. But it was not that only—but perhaps I ought not to ask questions."

"Ask any questions you like."

"What was it Mr. Marston had been doing? — something that Miss Kinseyle seemed to find out about while she was talking."

After a short pause, Mrs. Malcolm answered:

"That would be for Edith to say, if she likes."

"He has been suffering himself," Edith said slowly, "to an extent I never dreamed of before, in the effort to make me well."

"That was what I vaguely made out; but I was not sure. And without even intending that you should know?"

"Yes; that is what makes the self-sacrifice so very complete."

"Self-sacrifice! What an extraordinary thing it is, when you come to think of it," Terra observed reflectively.

"It is unusual," said Mrs. Malcolm, "but happily not quite impossible."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SACRIFICE ACCOMPLISHED.

The next day did not work itself out quite in accordance with the intentions the little party at Richmond had formed. Marston, to begin with, did not come down in the afternoon, as had been proposed. He telegraphed to Mrs. Malcolm in the morning to say he was not very well, and a great deal occupied, so that he could not join them for lunch—nor, perhaps, even at dinner; but he would certainly appear in the course of the evening.

Mrs. Malcolm was puzzled, the notion of Marston being kept away from Edith, when he had the option of being in her company, by any occupation she could think of, seeming absurd. But Edith's condition gave her concern also. The girl seemed somehow dispossessed of the bounding good spirits

that she generally enjoyed. In the morning she slept long and heavily. She declared herself still tired when Mrs. Malcolm went to her room, and accepted the offer of breakfast in bed. Not that she was eager for the breakfast — she was simply disinclined to leave her bed. Mrs. Malcolm sat with her, and talked and did knitting; and Edith read for a time, and only got up in the middle of the day. There was nothing the matter with her, she protested; she was merely dominated by the sentiment of the previous evening.

"All the same," Mrs. Malcolm argued, "if Colonel Danby saw you this morning, he would have a poor idea of me as a nurse for you."

"I dare say. People are so strangely mistaken about things they think they understand very often. I *am* languid to-day, and more face to face with the fact that I am ill than I have ever been before. And yet, if I were snatched away from Richmond just now, I should disappoint some hopes, I am quite sure; and should probably never be well enough to be manœuvred about the

south of Europe in the way Colonel Danby proposes."

"You talk with as much confidence, my dear, as if you were in your clairvoyant state."

"The two states are coming together, Marian; and it is a very strange experience. But don't be alarmed about me. Nothing could be so good for me, in regard to health even, as being down here, though I don't look flourishing to-day; and you don't want to be told, I'm sure, that it is best for me in every other way."

She got up in the middle of the day, and sat in the garden for a time, and then did a little piano-playing, and so on, whiling away a very quiet day. During intervals, while they were alone together, she and Mrs. Malcolm left nothing that concerned her, in the current crisis of her life, untalked of. She would not dilate at any great length, however, on her engagement, though she did not show any inclination to shirk the topic. The thing explained itself, and there was no intricacy of any interesting kind to be disclosed concerning its origin. As to Sidney

Marston, and his sad position in the world, they also talked at length.

"Is there no hope, don't you think," Edith asked, "that he will get a little more cheerful and interested in life after a time?"

Mrs. Malcolm could hardly explain to Edith all the grounds she had for believing this impossible; but, attributing the hopelessness of the case altogether to the circumstances which had crushed him, she nevertheless admitted frankly and fully that the case was hopeless.

"He sometimes has talked," she said, "in a way that has frightened me; for I do not think that anyone has a right to put a violent end to life, however wearisome it may be. But I must say—though I would not say this to him—that, if poor Sidney could be kindly translated by a higher power to another sphere of existence, I should mourn personally, for I have a very deep friendship for him; but not for his sake."

"It seems to shock me—the idea," Edith said, after a long, reflective pause; "death is so strange a metamorphosis. I suppose it ought to seem more shocking for me to con-

template the idea in my own case. It would disappoint so many people, now, if I were to die. And, as you say, it might be a release for Mr. Marston, while I ought to enjoy life if anybody can ; and yet——"

She did not finish the sentence at once, but went on presently, in a dreamy voice :

"From what you say, I suppose, if some higher power should say either I or Mr. Marston had to die, you would choose me to live ?"

"It's a comfortless kind of fancy for you to have, but—of course I should."

"And yet it would be odious and horrible for me to make that choice."

"My dear, the idea is—rather repulsive, as you say. People in general could hardly realize the idea of choosing to live at somebody else's expense, in that way, except as a selfish choice. But, if one can imagine that you had the power of choosing, it would certainly be a poor kindness to Sidney to choose that he should live, and see you die."

The idea was not developed any further, and the day passed—not exactly in sadness, but as though clouded by some solemnity,

and quite without any of the bright sallies of high spirits which generally threw a moral sunshine on any company to which Edith belonged.

"Dear Marian," said Edith, after they had gone through the brief and simple ceremony of dinner, and were re-established in the drawing-room; "I think it would be best, if you do not mind, that you should leave me to speak to Mr. Marston by myself for a time to-night. I know he will wish this; and I shall have some things to say to him, which you will know all about, no doubt, very soon, but which I ought to say to him in the first instance, with no one—not even your dear self—by to hear."

"Very well, dear. I am sure your impulses are entirely to be trusted."

"I knew you would not mind."

"*Mind!* As if I could have had so petty a thought! Terra and I will settle ourselves in the dining-room."

When, a little later, they heard a ring at the outer door, which they knew to mean Marston's arrival, Mrs. Malcolm was gathering up her work-things to go away in advance

of his coming; but Edith objected to this, and said there could be no such hurry.

"Let us wait and have some general talk first. We shall see. Perhaps I may be mistaken."

"You are getting beyond the liability of being mistaken in your intuitions, I think."

Marston was paler than usual, and evidently under the same kind of serious impression that had overruled Edith herself during the day; though his dark eyes seemed to gleam with more intensity than ever, and his manner to show a suppressed excitement.

"Are you better than in the morning?" Mrs. Malcolm asked. "I was afraid at first you were seriously ill, to be kept from coming to us as intended."

"My coming was very certain in the long run, though it was a little delayed."

"Perhaps it was best for Edith to have a perfectly quiet and restful afternoon. She has not been at all herself to-day."

"I suppose last night left its effects upon her; but I trust they will be only transitory. I am not anxious."

"How dreadfully unfeeling," Edith said with a touch of her usual gaiety, but a look that guarded the words from being taken too literally. "At Deerbury I could not cough without being gazed at with fearful solicitude; and if I had caught a cold the household would have trembled."

"I think all the better of Deerbury. From that point of view anxiety is most reasonable."

"You have been getting further and further from the common stand-point of late, it seems to me," said Mrs. Malcolm. "Have you been making any special progress, Sidney, in mysterious knowledge?"

"It is against all recognised rules and regulations for people who are studying mysterious knowledge at all to boast of their progress. Still, for once I may give myself a dispensation. I have been making progress —in some directions. I have concentrated my efforts more on learning certain things, with a definite purpose in view, and have succeeded in proportion to my concentration."

"I don't think you look as if success had agreed with you."

"Knowledge is worth more than physical vigour; and no one should understand that better than you."

"That is quite true; but so few people are weaned from the things of this world sufficiently to realize it."

"Scarcely anyone. Not I, for one, though I can state the theory in words."

Edith was listening silently, looking at him with a fixed gaze that seemed to see more than the external appearance of things. Mrs. Malcolm went on with the dialogue:

"What paradox do you mean by that? I should say you were as little wedded to the things of this world as a human being can be, to live at all."

"One may care not at all for the hundred-and-one pursuits and pleasures that most people are absorbed by, and yet not be weaned from this life. I can imagine conditions under which I should revel in it and enjoy it intensely. While that consciousness lurks in the background, it is a spurious kind of spirituality that is achieved by merely growing indifferent to life as it is."

"Sometimes I distrust even your meta-

physics, when you get morose and revile your own personality."

"You can see what I mean by comparing my spirituality, born of discontent, with the spirituality of nature and sympathy that Miss Kinseyle shows in her trances and half-trances."

Launched on this current, the conversation went on for some time longer on the same lines. It was only a phrase of Edith's later on, when the subject had been changed, which led Mrs. Malcolm to withdraw from her share of it. Marston had declared himself quite ready to refresh their sensitive by a dose of the old strengthening magnetism, which had exercised so potent an effect upon her on former occasions.

"I do not say I will not consent to be helped," Edith said, "but before I do I must come to some understanding with you, Mr. Marston."

"Well," said Mrs. Malcolm, "as I want the understanding come to, I shall leave you to arrange it by yourselves. Come, Terra, let us leave the magician and his pupil to their conference."

Marston merely answered, "Thanks; it's very good of you," opened the door for her as she rose and went out with Miss Fildare, and then returned to the seat he had been occupying—a low easy-chair near the sofa corner, in which Edith was as usual established.

"It is a part of the strange artificial life which we lead, that the chance of saying a few words alone to you should be a difficult privilege to gain."

"Did you inspire me to ask her to leave you alone with me?"

"I tried to."

"It only makes me the more anxious to speak plainly about all this. I have all kinds of impressions as to what you have been trying to do—more than impressions; and yet I do not like to speak of them to you till I am quite sure, in the ordinary way, I mean, by your telling me."

"I wish nothing better than to tell you quite plainly all that is in my heart about you—all I feel, and all I have provided for—though I saw last night that you came to know it by your higher faculties. It is quite

needless for me to be conventional and self-suppressed any more. It is a farewell I am taking of you, Edith, my beautiful queen; for I have learned how to realize the cry which rose to my lips, though I could not utter it then, when I was last talking to you in this room, on that miserable evening when I made you see the gulf between us, so plainly visible to me all along."

He had come up to her quite naturally and untheatrically as he spoke and knelt down by her side, taking one of her hands, which she made no affected effort to withdraw, but suffered him to hold quietly as he went on. She leaned sideways against the arm of the sofa, looking into his face with sad tenderness.

"What I thought, then, as I stood by you here was: Oh, that I could pour my life out at your feet, and know no more the desolation of vainly yearning for you! But it was a fruitless and empty groan then, and if my wish had been realized at the moment as I framed it, no purpose would have been served."

"I have had the reflection of your feeling

in my heart all day, and it has made me so intensely sad."

"But now—it is sad still, of course; but there is one thing made clear, and that is, what you know already, that I have found a way to pour out my life, not merely to ease my suffering, but in your blessed service. You ought not to have known it yet. I see now; there was the mistake of last night. But for that mistake, in the final and complete transfer to you of the life-energy which holds my body and soul in unwilling companionship, you would have gained all that was needed without the disturbance of feeling due to knowing how it was gained. Now you must know and understand it all; but, my pure and unattainable love, do not reject the offering. Take it in perfect frankness and simplicity. Let your acceptance of it be the only return you can make—the only return you can make for my unutterable love."

She did not speak as yet, but only shook her head slowly and sadly, though her hand vitalized itself in his grasp, and conveyed thanks more eloquent than words.

"If you do this, then you condone last night's mistake for me."

'My friend, you talk of laying down your life for me in a way that ought to startle me into terrified protest, only I have understood what you meant since last night, and have been thinking of nothing else—so I am not startled now. But you must not—you *must not*—I could not accept life on such terms."

"But, Edith——"

"Hush! Think of the whole thing from my point of view. I am bewildered about myself; but remember what pledges I have given. Your supreme devotion is so wonderful, you are entitled to say anything to me; but I should be frightfully to blame if I go on listening to you. It is all a terrible entanglement."

"Edith," he repeated softly, but firmly, again using her name, in spite of her protest, "I may give you your dear name because, in telling you of my love, I am not pleading for any reward—as you truly saw in your clairvoyant state last night. The memory of this love shall not be a trouble in your heart

in the future, but, if I may humbly say so, an elevating thought. It is not as if I ever dreamed of trying to tear you away from the bright prospect life holds out to you, to make your beautiful existence my prey. I have never contemplated the idea that you could make the extravagant sacrifices required to bring that about. Death sanctifies such recollections as this talk of ours to-night may leave with you; and in the very act of telling you how I adore you—in this one-sided exhalation of love—I am speaking almost as I might have spoken in a written paper, to be left behind me when I go away. I had thought that would have been all I could do. I meant to have written a letter to you, to leave in Marian's care, that she might have given it you some day when alone with you. But you divined everything last night, and now I may speak instead of writing; but it is the same thing. Edith—Edith, my divinity, never mind how or why I love you in this way—never mind the mystery of the thing—perhaps that will grow clearer later; but, you see, the fact is so, and cannot be altered. I love you in a way which, if you

could constrain me to live on—for I should have in that case to live without you—would make life a torture. It would not be in the nature of things that you should have any corresponding feeling. I know you have not, and I do not claim it for one instant. All I claim is, that you should think of me with just so much trustful regard as may enable you to receive my offering without reluctance, and wear the memory of it as something that need not be in any way irksome."

"I tell you I could not. It may be weakness of a kind. If I wanted to live for any grand purpose, then I would accept what you offer me; but if I live, what will it be for? Just to lead an empty, frivolous, luxurious life, that will not make me or anyone else any better really. Dear friend, you forget that the very influence you have been bringing to bear upon me, especially since last night—indeed, since last night it seems all translated into that—tends to raise my thoughts and aspirations above the sort of happiness life holds out to me. Would it be happiness at all, now? I hardly know; but, at any rate, that sort of happiness purchased this way

would be unbearable. I cannot—I cannot——"

"My love, be merciful and gracious, and do not reject my offering. For, Edith, dearest, I tell you the die is cast—the step is taken. I could not draw back if I would, and Heaven knows how little I would if I could! This day has been spent in work that cannot be undone. If I had been dying from common-place illness in the ordinary way, and you had come to me, when the result was known to be inevitable, at my entreaty, to give me the blessing of dying with your adored face before my eyes, I should not be more free than I am to speak to you as I am speaking. I shall never see you again, my beloved, after this night. Listen——"

As he spoke, they caught faintly the sound of wheels on the little sweep of road coming up to the hall-door from the main road, for the house stood back a little from the thoroughfare in which it was situated.

"I have got a carriage here to take me back to town, for the—the irritation and strain of going by the railway after I leave you

would have been too much to face. My Edith, that is my excuse for the freedom I give myself in these last few moments. Even now I love and reverence you so that I would obey you if you deny me the farewell I want; but you will not rob my parting from you of the sweetness, the remembrance of which will be the blessing of my future existence—the one thought, the one consciousness, that will vibrate there."

He leaned forward as he spoke, and gathered her slight form in his arms and kissed her wildly again and again. The conflict of emotions by which she was torn and shaken forbade her from speaking distinctly. Her eyes were swimming with tears and her lips quivering.

"I give you my life, my own. It is my supreme act of will. You cannot refuse it. It is transfusing into your being as I speak, and my heart, that has been beating for you only for so long, is beating nearly its last now in glad and proud exhaustion for your sake, as it rests for the first and last time against your own. You shall be happy in this life, my glorious queen—in this life as

well as in the next—and you will not be pained by the recollection of this evening after the first excitement of it has passed. You will *know*, with your splendid spiritual consciousness, that this settlement of things is best. My beloved, we could not both be happy on this earth, at all events, and I choose to stand aside and let you pass; and then—I do not know what will happen to me exactly; but I shall be no longer bound to this suffering organism which has been condemned to exist apart from you. Anyhow, I am of service to you in dying, and I can be of no service to you living."

Whatever influences were working upon her—the intense excitement through which she was passing, or something else as well,—were now so powerful that any coherent thought, not to speak of argumentative protests, were wholly impossible for her. She lay in his arms panting and flushed and giddy with the tumultuous energy pulsing through her veins. She clung to him, unconscious of what she was doing, and he remained kneeling beside her, clasping her in a close embrace and murmuring words of love and devotion

and farewell. Under the dominion of a different kind of bewilderment his own words became more confused and his own sight uncertain after a time.

"Ah!—I am staying—too long," he stammered,—"I must go—good-bye—good-bye."

He rose to his feet, staggering as if intoxicated, clutched at the chairs, and made his way to the door. The noise he made as he stumbled across the hall attracted Mrs. Malcolm from the dining-room. He had already seized his hat, which he held in his hand as he opened the outer door.

"Sidney, what on earth is the matter?"

"Don't stop me — good-bye. *She* will explain."

"Ah, you will fall!" she cried, as he almost fell over the two or three steps which separated the level of the hall from that of the road.

Edith came flying through the hall from the drawing-room as he was opening the carriage door.

"Do not let him go," she cried, "Marian —he is very ill. Stay; I command you to stop. I will not live without you."

"Too late! too late!" he answered, but rather in exultation than in sorrow. He was stepping into the brougham, but she came impetuously up to him and he embraced her once more. "I shall carry your last thought with me," he whispered, "my love, my love—my gratitude and blessing for it;—but do not keep me back another moment." With the same gesture he put her away from him, and threw himself backward into the carriage, drawing the door to after him. "Drive on," he called in a loud voice to the coachman.

The tone of intense adjuration in which he had bidden Edith not to delay him, held her paralysed in obedience to his wish. In the darkness outside Mrs. Malcolm and Terra Fildare in the hall had not seen what passed. The carriage started off quickly, and its wheels in a few moments grew fainter along the road.

"Darling," said Mrs. Malcolm, coming to the door and calling to Edith. "Don't stand there. Come in out of the night air; you will be taking cold. Tell me what extraordinary thing has happened."

"Taking cold!" repeated Edith, with a strange scorn for the idea in the tone of her voice. "You don't know yet, Marian. There is little fear of my taking cold." She came back into the lighted hall, and faced Mrs. Malcolm—gazing at her wildly. "Good Heavens! it is terrible."

"What possesses you?"

But the noise in the hall had attracted one of the maids.

"I will tell you," she said, seizing Mrs. Malcolm's hand and dragging her along to the drawing-room with a greater exercise of force than she was conscious of giving out at the moment. Terra hesitated whether to follow, but Edith held the door open and called to her to come.

"Why should there be any secret? Surely such things should be known, that people may understand what heroism is possible."

The whole situation seemed to flash on Mrs. Malcolm's understanding as they stood together in the room without another word being spoken. Edith stood on the hearthrug with compressed lips, breathing hard through her nostrils. Mrs. Malcolm uttered a cry,

and put up her hands to each side of her forehead.

"Yes; he has died for me," Edith said almost fiercely. "We shall never see him living again."

"How do you mean, died?" cried Terra. Mrs. Malcolm, understanding the whole position, had remained silent, but Terra was startled into disregarding her usual rule of not asking questions across the current of her friends' mysterious talk, by the nature of Edith's last exclamation.

"You may well ask," Edith said. It was a necessity for her to speak, in the intensity of her excitement and vehemence, and Terra's complete ignorance of the whole mystery involved was an opportunity on which she seized.

"These things which are so strange to you are tremendous realities to him and to me. He had always been able to make me strong —to refresh me by magnetism when I was enfeebled—and that used to exhaust him in exactly the same way it strengthened me. It was a transfer of vitality. He could give it out, I could absorb it. But these small

efforts in the past were as nothing to what he found out at last to be possible. He has learned how to pour out his life in a great flood upon me, so that I have been made strong and well, and he—is dead at this moment in the carriage that is driving his body to London!"

Terra uttered a cry of astonishment and horror, and sat down trembling in a chair. Mrs. Malcolm put her handkerchief to her eyes, and sitting down on the sofa corner, buried her face in the cushions. Edith began to pace the room, backwards and forwards along the side that was clearest of furniture, pushing the light things out of her way as she passed.

"But why," asked Terra presently in bewilderment, "why has he done this?"

"Why? Well, indeed, you may ask, for love, I suppose, does not often take such a turn as that. He had come to care for nothing in life but me, and now I see quite clearly he had such power over me really, though I never felt it, because he never tried to exert it, that he might have drawn me to anything, in spite of—in spite of everything

that made me never think of him in that way. But he wouldn't do that, because he cared more for my happiness than for his own—more for my life than for his own. Oh, Marian, was there ever anything so heroic, when you come to think of it? It is not the sacrifice of life that is the great thing. It is the other sacrifice that overwhelms me, though the life sacrifice illuminates it so wonderfully."

Mrs. Malcolm shook her head and looked up when thus addressed, speaking with difficulty, for she had been giving her lost friend a genuine and hearty tribute of tears.

"It is altogether beautiful and noble, and it is miserable to lose him, but I verily believe he did the best and wisest thing possible."

"I am not sure," said Edith.

"Do you mean that his intention in some way may fail?"

"Fail? In one way it is accomplished. I could tear myself to pieces for it, but as for my physical strength I feel wild with strength —like a panther or a leopard. But I can't bear the feeling. If it was altogether another sort of strength he had given me, if I was so

much the higher raised towards the nobler state he has sometimes been able to put me into, that would seem a result better worth the sacrifice; but merely to get health—that is not what I want, not what I care about—What?"

The last exclamation was suddenly uttered as if in answer to some interruption that had not come from either of the two living people with her. She had stopped suddenly in her walk facing the unoccupied corner of the room, as though the interruption had come from there.

"Did you see anything?" she asked of Mrs. Malcolm, who had looked up, following the direction of her gaze.

"No."

"It was Zephyr again. He was visible there for a few moments, and he seemed to speak to me, but I did not distinctly hear what was said . . . What did he mean? I feel he meant to call my attention somehow——"

Obeying an impulse that she did not stop to reason about, she went to the door and threw it open.

"There!" she cried impetuously, "Don't you see that—— ?"

Both Mrs. Malcolm and Terra Fildare sprang forward and looked out into the hall, following the direction to which her arm pointed.

This time they both saw—the same effect that she saw herself.

"Mr. Marston!" Terra called out in astonishment.

"Sidney ?"

Edith herself made no sound, but she made a step forward beyond the doorway. Marston's figure had been seen by them all, standing in the middle of the hall, with a proud and joyous look lighting up the face. As Edith stepped forward it seemed to grow indistinct. She paused, and it remained in sight a few moments longer, and then seemed to move across the hall and disappear, though there was no way out in the direction towards which it passed.

"Oh, good Heavens!" Terra exclaimed, trembling violently, "was that a ghost ?"

"One that you need hardly fear," said Edith. "My noble, true-hearted friend!" She

went out into the hall and wandered about, standing where the figure had been perceptible just before, and passing across in the direction it had taken.

"He looked happier than he ever looked in life; did he not, Marian?"

The vision somehow worked a soothing effect upon her, but when she came back into the drawing-room she found Terra very much overcome and almost fainting. Her nerves, entirely unused to psychic appearances, had been upset by the sudden contact with what to her had all the terrors of the supernatural. She had clung for support to Mrs. Malcolm, who guided her to the sofa, and her usually glowing colour had faded to an earthy tint.

Edith went to the dining-room to get water, and, held up by Mrs. Malcolm's calm and resolute assurances that there was nothing to be frightened about as much as by her own natural strength of character, which made her instinctively struggle against faintness, she passed the critical moment without actually losing consciousness. She took some of the water which Edith brought, and wet hand-

kerchiefs were dabbed on her forehead till she recovered her self-possession and could talk of what had occurred.

"That sort of spectral appearance," Mrs. Malcolm assured her, "is often seen when people are at the point of death. Nothing is more natural than that it should have been visible here under the circumstances."

"It's such an overwhelming thing to actually *see*," she protested, none the less. "But how did you know it was there?" she asked of Edith.

"Zephyr told me. That's a spirit I see all to myself. He showed himself and spoke to me just before, and then I half understood what he meant, and opened the door."

"But do you mean to say you saw some other spectre in here?"

They were none of them in a laughing mood, so the question, which at another time might have had a ludicrous aspect, was met by some grave explanation that had all the greater force for Terra by reason of the shock she had just gone through.

"I *wish* Zephyr would come back and talk to me quietly," Edith exclaimed impatiently

after awhile; "he might tell me things I want to know," and in her eagerness she called aloud upon her absent sprite; Terra shuddered, and entreated her not.

"It wouldn't affect you," Edith said. "You wouldn't see him. Marian even does not see him. But it seems no use for the moment. Perhaps I am too excited just now; I may be able to get him to come when I am alone upstairs and quiet."

This idea appeared so frightful to Terra that it led to further talk about psychic phenomena, which constituted a revelation for her that could hardly have had the same effect at any other time. Her nerves, however, had undergone so great a strain that she gladly accepted Mrs. Malcolm's offer to take her over into her own room for the night.

"I thought I was a fairly courageous person," she said; "but I am sorry to see I am a greater coward than I thought."

"There is no question of cowardice or bravery in the matter, my dear. It is a question of familiarity."

Edith meanwhile had grown all the more

impatient for the seclusion of her own room.

"Perhaps I shall understand things better in the morning," she said; and with that they separated.

CHAPTER X.

SEEN IN A NEW LIGHT.

Mrs. Malcolm did not wait to receive news of Marston's death through any ordinary channel, but telegraphed to her brother at the Hague the following morning, begging him to come over at once in connection with an urgent matter affecting their friend. She said that an explanatory letter would await him at his club, as she had no wish to bring about a premature meeting between himself and Terra Fildare. To Terra she said nothing at the time on the subject of the message, though a great deal of earnest talk passed between them during the day. The events of the previous night had made a deep impression on Terra, and put a new face, for her, in many ways, on her own trouble. Edith had been up early, pacing about the

garden by herself, but, though restless and excited, was more inclined to remain alone, wrapped in her own thoughts, than to open them out even to Mrs. Malcolm just then. She had seen Zephyr again in the night, she declared, and had learned some things she wished to know, but had not got her mind clear enough to talk of them for the moment.

"Look at it how you will," she said, "it is a tragedy—a catastrophe of which I am the cause. There might have been a very different end to it, and perhaps there ought to have been."

Terra naturally asked, when alone with Mrs. Malcolm, for information concerning the course of Edith's engagement.

"It was a very natural result about Colonel Danby," she said. "Everybody saw that he was paying her great attention at Oatfield; and it was a very nice match for her. But had this affair with Mr. Marston gone far?"

"The situation was so strange and unusual, that though it had gone far in one way, it had not gone on at all in the way you mean. Of course Mr. Marston was in love with her—I knew that—but he never said a word

on the subject to her, and he never entertained the thought of marrying her. There was a great shadow over his own life that made him think it would be wrong to ask any woman to share it. He had the most beautifully unselfish nature; and he let Edith know about the shadow that I refer to, in a way that he intended to put all thoughts that he could be aiming at acceptance as her lover out of the question."

"If he had kept the secret, do you think——" Terra asked mournfully. "Could he have made her care for him?"

"I am sure he could; not merely because there was so much lovable in him in the ordinary way, but because he had so much psychic influence over her. You can understand that now, after what you have seen. But it is impossible for anyone who knew Sydney Marston as I did to think of him as attempting to gain any object of his own at the cost of a deception like that. The truth is, I believe, that without any deception at all, even after he had told Edith the secret I speak of—which was nothing disgraceful to himself in any way—that he might have won

her. But, as I say, he did not think his life bright enough for her to share; and under the circumstances, much as she liked him, she never came to have any feeling about him that was overwhelming in its strength—enough to make her put aside all worldly considerations."

"Oh, Mrs. Malcolm!" said Terra, with something like a groan. "Just think of the difference between his behaviour and—the way I was treated!"

Absorbed in her thoughts about Edith and Marston, Mrs. Malcolm had not at first seen the intricate parallel. She looked up at Terra now, as they sat together by the drawing-room window, and realized the course of the girl's thoughts.

"Yes; there is something in common between the two cases. Don't let it hurt you too much, dear. Perhaps it was thoughtless to bring the idea before your mind."

"Hurt me! It ought to hurt me!" said Terra. "Oh! I deserve so thoroughly to be hurt for worshipping an image of gilded clay."

The perfection of Mrs. Malcolm's sympathy

had always guarded her from the mistake that a friend of less delicacy of feeling might have made, and she had never aggravated the distress of Terra's position by reviling the behaviour of the Count. Even now she did not break out into any emphatic endorsement of Terra's outcry, but cherished her instead, taking her hand and speaking soothingly.

"My poor wounded bird, we are all liable to be short-sighted and to make mistakes in life!"

"But just think of it. There was more than a shadow over the life in my case—something that made it a horror and an outrage to me that I should be asked to share it. But merely because he coveted me in mere selfish desire for his own sake, he exposed me to all that. If my future had been wrecked, and destroyed, and made shameful, he would have been indifferent by that time. He simply sought me as a man might seek the basest gratification for himself. Oh, heavens! to think what human nature is capable of!"

"Human nature is capable of both extremes, dear."

"Yes; I see that now, and the sight of one extreme has shown me the other. But oh! Mrs. Malcolm, I was mad enough to love him, and I am so *ashamed* of myself!"

She burst out crying and knelt down, hiding her face in Mrs. Malcolm's lap. Her wise friend did not regret or ridicule the tears, but caressed her and spoke affectionate words in a disjointed way, without arguing the matter at all. Terra's intense and passionate nature, however, made the crisis a severe one for her, and she went on with fresh self-reproaches when she had recovered command of her voice.

"I suppose a disgusting thirst for rank and riches had more to do with the matter than I supposed. I ought to go and be a semptress for a punishment, and earn my living in a garret."

"Terra, dear," said Mrs. Malcolm, not thinking it necessary to answer the last outcry definitely, "I was drawn to you at first just in mere sympathy with you in your trouble, but I never expected I should come to love you as I do now."

"I'm not fit to be loved."

"Then I must be very foolish.'

The strain of her emotion was relaxed after a time, and later on they spoke again of Edith.

"Do you think she is suffering very much?" Terra asked. "She seems so wild and excited I do not understand her."

"Edith has such a wonderful double nature, it is very difficult to judge her thoughts and feelings by ordinary rules. After last night you will realize that. In general it is only people with what we call psychic faculties who can understand others of their own kind. Other people have an incredulous impression that psychic attributes are all fancy and nonsense; but of course, for those who have them, they are the most real things of all."

"But why didn't she fall in love with Mr. Marston?"

"I don't know. As I say, she has a double nature. Of course, all the ordinary feelings and facts of life told upon her too. Away at Oatfield, you see, she was under the dominion of the more worldly side of her nature, I suppose, and from that point of

view of course poor Sidney would have been an impossible person as a lover. And indeed he *was* impossible, if her health and life could only be purchased by the sacrifice that has been made."

"That is so utterly extraordinary."

"Yes, indeed; but just as physical a fact, you see, as commonplace things that are better understood."

"What a realm of wonder you and she must have been living in when she was down here with you before!"

"Yes, indeed; to a greater extent than you can realize yet. Even after what you have seen you would not be able to believe some things I could tell you about Edith."

"I do not torment you with questions, Mrs. Malcolm, because I have seemed to be so outside it all. But I am sure I should not disbelieve anything you tell me really happened."

"Well, let it come bit by bit, dear. It will be better so."

In the afternoon, when Edith, who had been roaming about the house in an unquiet way, had gone out for a walk by

herself, Terra began again about her own affairs.

"I think I ought to write to papa, Mrs. Malcolm," she said, "and make some sort of abject confession that I have come at last to see what a fool I have been, and how badly I behaved to him."

"Write him a nice letter, dear, by all means, but I am sure he will not want any apologies. It will be reward enough for him if he can be enabled to see that you are getting over your trouble a little."

"How did he find it all out, Mrs. Malcolm? That's what I can't understand. How could he learn everything all at once over in India, and come straight home, picking up—that woman on his way without a day's loss of time? It's perfectly bewildering."

Mrs. Malcolm remained silent.

"Of course I haven't a right to be told anything; but do you know anything as to how he found it out?"

"I know some things, dear, but—it's so awkward."

"Very well," said Terra, with a new im-

pulse of the meekness with which she was lashing her own remorse. "Indeed, I do not complain if you choose not to tell me. I do honestly feel what I say, that I am utterly without any claim in the matter of any sort."

"My own dear, I have hesitated from such different reasons. First of all it did not seem necessary to worry you with details. All I was anxious to do was to soothe and sorrow with you when you suffered. It is very nice of you to reproach yourself, but of course you will not really suspect me of joining with you in any reproaches of that sort. I only look upon you as my dear patient, who has been cruelly hurt, and if I can nurse you into health again I shall be very happy."

Terra responded by a look of gratitude, but said nothing for the moment. Mrs. Malcolm went on—

"But I can see that, of course, you must be wanting to know more, and now I will be brave enough to be frank. You see, we all helped your father in one way or another, and though it was done, of course, in the

purest and simplest way imaginable, I was afraid at first that you might think we had been meddlesome. There, dear, you see it is I who have to make a confession, and I do hope now I have begun it that you will give me absolution, and tell me you do not think my interference was impertinent."

Terra gazed with open eyes of wonder, but the right note in her heart had been struck by the conversation of the morning, and without waiting to hear more she sat down on the ground, with her arm across Mrs. Malcolm's lap, and said :

"Now, then, let me know the full measure of my debt to you. So you have not alone nursed me through my misery, but were the person who saved me from the first!"

"I am so glad you take it in that way that I will absorb all the praises you can give me. It is so difficult to do people a service sometimes, because, indeed, it is only a generous nature that can feel gratitude, and one is so apt to excite a very different feeling, especially where there is so much pain to be borne as you have gone through."

"Oh, I'm a very noble and beautiful

specimen of humanity, I know," Terra replied with a sarcastic emphasis. "And now may I know some more, and see whether I can forgive you for rescuing me from the horrible snare my own wisdom and goodness was taking me into?"

"I can tell you the main thing in half a dozen words, and you will understand them now, though you could not have done so yesterday. The whole situation was seen clairvoyantly by Edith!"

The revelation was so entirely different from anything she had expected that Terra was dumb for a while with surprise. By slow degrees, and bit by bit, the whole story was told; how Mrs. Malcolm's suspicions had been awakened by impressions Edith had had at Oatfield, and how the whole truth was brought out afterwards during her trance.

"But then, how was the woman to be got at? Did you write to papa?"

"No; that would have wasted too much time." Up to this point of the conversation George Ferrars' name had not been mentioned. Now, as naturally and easily as she could, Mrs. Malcolm added: "You see, my

brother was with us then, so he took his share of the work at that point—went over to Spain and found the woman, and induced her to go with him to Brindisi, where he gave her over to Colonel Fildare, with all the necessary information. And then he went back to the Hague."

The emotions Terra had been going through during the day had exhausted her liability to fresh agitation for the moment. She listened in a kind of stupor, and said nothing in immediate reply, while Mrs. Malcolm stroked the beautiful masses of her loose tawny hair.

"Oh, the trouble I've been giving to people!" she murmured presently. "Oh, Mrs. Malcolm, what a *pity* I wasn't drowned in my cradle!"

"My dear, do you think there is anybody of all the people concerned who would not feel rewarded over and over again by knowing you were content—that is, that you had accepted the service rendered without thinking it meddlesome?"

"I am very grateful," said Terra in a low voice presently, "to everyone concerned."

CHAPTER XI.

RECOVERED.

George Ferrars would have had news of Marston's death even if Mrs. Malcolm had not sent him the telegram. For papers were found upon Marston's person directing that news should be sent to his friend. He lived in utter loneliness at Temple chambers, and had no intimate friends among his neighbours, but the final course of events had been provided for with much careful arrangement. When the brougham reached town, and the coachman endeavoured to obtain from his passenger some information as to which of the Temple entrances he should make for, he could obtain no response. He had to stop and get down from his box, thinking his temporary master was in a very sound sleep. When he found that something was wrong he appealed to a policeman, and then, by the

counsels of this sensible adviser, drove to the nearest hospital. There the true state of the case became apparent, and search being made for pocket-book or letters to identify the dead man, a letter was found addressed "to the proper authorities if I should die suddenly." This letter, in an open envelope, announced that the writer knew he was suffering from heart disease, and might expire suddenly at any moment. It explained that in that case he would wish the news of his death communicated to Mr. George Ferrars, his greatest friend, then at such and such an address abroad, and also to solicitors, whose address was given. The solicitors applied to the following day on behalf of the hospital authorities confirmed the statement in the letter. Within the last few weeks their client had actually mentioned to them that his sudden death was an event within reasonable probability. They held his will, of which Mr. Ferrars was the executor. The whole incident was perfectly intelligible, and was disposed of by a paragraph of six or seven lines in some of the newspapers. The inquest was a mere formality, and before

Ferrars could actually start in obedience to his sister's message he received news of the death from the solicitors. He was in London on the day following that on which the conversations last recorded had taken place between Terra Fildare and Mrs. Malcolm.

Mrs. Malcolm had not entrusted even to the letter she sent to meet her brother at his club any full account of the extraordinary circumstances really attending Marston's death. These she gave him at a meeting they arranged in town, at the private hotel in a street off Piccadilly where he generally put up when in London. This rendezvous took place on the third day of Edith's visit, when, in fulfilment of the original programme, she delivered herself up to her Deerbury Park friends at Brook Street, coming up from Richmond with Mrs. Malcolm.

"If I could have seen my way clearly," she told Mrs. Malcolm, as they were going up in the train, "I should have insisted on a longer stay with you under the circumtances; but I don't know yet what I ought to do. The only thing I feel bent upon is that I must go back home to Compton Wood for

a time. I can't explain what has occurred in any way that will be in the least intelligible to any of the people about me, but I shall tell them I have shared the shock you have experienced in the sudden death of a very near and intimate friend, and this may be an excuse for some little delay in the arrangements that were being made."

"But are you coming to shrink from them, Edith dear?"

"I don't know. At all events, anything immediate would be intensely distasteful to me."

"I can understand that—and I should be sorry if you felt differently; but still I have a feeling now that since the sacrifice has been made, the truest response you can make to it is to let it bear the fruit it was meant to bear."

"We must see. But at all events for the present I must go to Compton Wood. Marian, will you hold yourself ready to come to me there at short notice, if I should really have need of you?"

Mrs. Malcolm promised, but at once foresaw a possible difficulty about Terra, if such a summons should come soon.

"You must bring Terra with you, if you cannot make any other arrangement; but I have a feeling that I might be wild to have you with me. I feel on the brink of some kind of crisis. I don't know what it is, and I have had nothing unusual happen to me in the way of psychic things—but I seem somehow just ready to burst some sort of shell. That is why I must go to Compton Wood. If anything is to happen to me, it will be at Kinseyle Court."

"I wish I could go with you at once."

"I wish to goodness you could."

They both felt, however, that a real duty stood in the way, and nothing more was said on that subject. Mrs. Malcolm did not go in with Edith at the Brook Street Hotel, but ascertaining that her friends were there, bade her good-bye in the carriage, which had been sent to meet Edith at the station, and then went on alone to see her brother.

"I shall see you again soon," Edith had said, "I am sure of that," and their parting was not treated as a serious solemnity.

"And now," said George Ferrars to his sister, when they met shortly afterwards,

" is there any clue to this mystery? I never knew that Sidney had heart disease."

"He hadn't anything of the kind. His death has been something too solemn and wonderful to write of in a letter. But now I will tell you all about it."

When the whole situation had at last been made clear to him, Ferrars declared that the tragedy of the death had been lost in the splendour of it. "It was well and grandly done. That was Sidney Marston all over."

"Yes; it was beautiful and heroic, we have all felt that;—no one more so than Terra Fildare."

"Does she realize the thing? It is so out of the common way that I should think no one could understand it without having been trained by knowing you or Miss Kinseyle."

"She was present, you see, on the evening when we saw Sidney's wraith. That made an immense impression on her. And then there were other things to guard her from incredulity. She understands fully what was done, and it is a great blessing for her that she has so understood it."

"How do you mean?"

"It has let in a flood of light on her mind, and has shown her her own recent adventures in their true colour. It was she detected the significance of the contrast, when I had been so wrapped up in thoughts of poor Sidney that I had not seen it — the contrast, I mean, between the devotion and unselfishness of his life sacrifice on Edith's behalf, and the cruel reckless selfishness of the man she herself was so nearly falling a victim to. It was a great crisis for her, George, but she has come through it cured to an extent that might have seemed quite impossible, considering the short time that has elapsed."

"I am *very* glad to hear it."

"Indeed, I may almost say that without your name having been explicitly mentioned I have a sort of indirect message for you."

"But, good heavens! Marian, you have not told her anything about my share in the late discoveries?"

"Trust me, George, to have done right. I knew your feeling, and I knew the risk, but I knew that the proper moment had come. I never thought to do so so soon, but I told Terra

everything, and though it was a shock to her to realize all the trouble that had been taken for her, her final comment was that she was deeply grateful to all the persons concerned."

"How faultless your tact is, Marian! But your perfect influence has been at work, too, for the last fortnight."

"It was Sidney really who worked the double miracle; but my part has been made easy in more ways than one — especially because I have come to love Terra more sincerely than I ever thought to."

"That's good."

"I have not had any talk with you, George, since the crisis. I should like to know whether anything—any subtle working of all that has happened—has affected your own feelings in any way, or whether you still feel as you used about her."

"Of course; one does not change in matters of that kind."

"That's right; because I should think now, in the long run, everything ought to be as you wish."

Meanwhile Mrs. Malcolm said nothing at Richmond of her brother's presence in London,

and a few days passed without the fact betraying itself to Terra. Her "nice letter" to her father in the interim had produced satisfactory results, and was answered, as regards the most important reply it elicited, by Lady Margreave. Terra was assured that in view of what she had written to her father she was entirely forgiven, and would be welcomed back to Oatfield whenever she liked to come.

"Very black storms will sometimes break up more quickly than seems likely at first, when the change once sets in," Mrs. Malcolm remarked on reading the letter. "It will be right for you to respond to that proposal cordially, and to go back to Oatfield soon. But you have a second home here, you know, at all times, and you must look on coming here as a duty—a pleasant duty, I hope, but a duty still, seeing that I shall be wanting you so badly."

This led to some discussion as to when Terra should go, and this to an admission on Mrs. Malcolm's part that when she went she herself would go down for awhile to Edith, at Compton Wood. An apprehension that

she was in the way of this arrangement was at once kindled in Terra's mind; but Mrs. Malcolm contrived to subdue it by representing that Edith had not yet summoned her to go down. Terra was only partially satisfied by the explanation, but Mrs. Malcolm persuaded her to wait on at Richmond till Edith's summons should come, assuming that it might come within a week or so. Thus they could set out for their respective destinations together. Then, however, they got talking about Marston, and Terra asked some straightforward questions about what had been the course of events in regard to the funeral, and so forth. What friends and relations had Marston lived amongst?

"He was practically alone in the world," Mrs. Malcolm explained. "He had a brother in Australia, and a sister out there married."

"But somebody must have looked after the funeral. Who were his nearest friends?"

"We were by far his nearest friends in the sense of true affection and sympathy. My brother George was his only real in-

timate amongst men, and of course he has been doing what was necessary."

"He—Mr. Ferrars? but I thought he was at the Hague."

"He came over to look after Sidney's affairs, and has been doing what had to be done."

Terra was silent. That the fear lest she had been in the way in this matter again, and had been keeping George Ferrars out of his natural resting-place in his sister's house, was passing through her mind, was too obvious to be overlooked. And when she said in a serious, constrained tone, and with a clouded brow:

"Marian, tell me where your brother generally lives when he is in England?" Mrs. Malcolm met the inquiry with a frank and open smile.

"In Half Moon Street, my dear, at the Crown Hotel. He finds it conveniently near his club."

"But he was down here with you when Edith was with you the other time."

"He used not to sleep here. He came down for dinner, and so forth—but that was all."

"But now he can't come, however much he and you may wish it, because there is an intruder in the field he would find it awkward or disagreeable to meet. What an unfortunate creature I am!"

"My dear Terra, we are all bound to consider your feelings and peace of mind, after all you have gone through. I can easily see George in town whenever I want to; but you must not be disturbed in this retreat by anyone till you are quite ready to see people."

"I tell you my retreat ought to have been a penitentiary."

"But you see my poor little house and Oatfield are both competing for you, so the claims of the penitentiary are borne down."

"But, Marian, it is horrible to feel I am making your house unapproachable to your own brother, whom you value so intensely. If it is too disagreeable for him to meet me here, do let me go off at once."

"Who said it would be disagreeable for him to meet you, dear? The whole thing is a question of your peace and comfort. Of course, if you do not really mind having him

come here sometimes, he will be very glad to come."

So they met again the following afternoon —quite unexpectedly for Terra. She and Mrs. Malcolm were sitting in the bow-window of the drawing-room, with tea on a little table beside them, also bearing some fancy work materials—with which Terra, infected by Mrs. Malcolm's example, was getting into the way of sometimes occupying her fingers—when the maid opened the door and, in the most natural tone in the world, said, "Mr. Ferrars."

George came in, grave with a sense of the momentous nature of the visit, but as undemonstrative and simple in manner as if he had been paying any other ordinary call. Terra bent forward for a moment over her work—she was turned away from the door, facing outwards towards the garden—and then looked round, rose up and shook hands, with the usual question of conventional greeting on her lips. Ferrars replied to it in the same terms, kissed his sister, and sat down, drifting into a commonplace chat about the appearance of the garden, the tea, and

the wool-work—the key-note of the situation once struck in this way dominated the conversation all the afternoon and during dinner. No burning questions were touched upon, and nothing said in regard to the important part Ferrars had played in bringing about the overthrow of Terra's recent engagement; but the fact that she was ready to be on friendly terms with him—knowing all that he had done—was sufficient evidence for him that she did not resent the interference.

They naturally discussed Edith and her affairs at great length, and Marston's great sacrifice, and all the wonderful views of psychic mystery which the whole of that transaction opened out; but George and Terra were at no time alone together, and perhaps neither regretted that the evening should in this way have been dedicated merely to a dissipation of the first feeling of awkwardness incidental to the renewal of their intercourse.

The ice once broken, Ferrars was free of his sister's house again, and resumed coming there, as a matter of course, every day. Probably, if Terra had been regularly settled

at Richmond, some time might have elapsed before any definite words were spoken in renewal of his old suit to her; but on the third day of his restored intimacy, he found a crisis impending, on his arrival by appointment for a drive with the two ladies in the park. A letter had come from Edith, claiming the fulfilment of Mrs. Malcolm's promise to go to Compton Wood. She entreated her to come with all possible speed, bringing Terra with her if need were, but in any case to come.

In accordance with the plan already settled, Terra had written off at once to Oatfield, warning Lady Margreave to expect her the following day; and Mrs. Malcolm was upstairs when Ferrars arrived, making her own arrangements for the journey. Ferrars was rather disconcerted by the new programme at first, and sat down in the bow-window, not far from Terra's chair, with an expression of regret at the break-up of the party.

"One is never left in peace for long in this world. Fate seems to hunt us about in a very persevering way."

"It has been an incalculable blessing for me to have been left all this time with your sister. Her sympathy and friendship are substantial, good things in this life, which it is worth—going through a great deal to have gained."

"You have certainly gained them very completely. I need hardly tell you how fond she is of you."

"I know that is so, though the reasons of it are altogether in her own goodness. I have only caused her a great deal of trouble and worry. But it has been my destiny to serve all my friends and relations in the same way."

"I suppose there might be some way of accounting for it, if they none of them mind?"

"I mind very much myself, at any rate. I used to be what people stupidly call proud, which means very surly and reluctant to accept services. Part of the penalty for me has been that I have been overwhelmed by services that——" She hesitated a little, and Ferrars finished the sentence.

"That you need not have known anything

about—in some cases, at all events. Then you would have been spared any uncomfortable feelings on the subject."

"At the expense of having my own worst qualities fed and stimulated. I am not sorry that I have to acknowledge the help rendered me in spite of myself. It is a good lesson."

There was still some internal chafing in her nature against the attitude she thus took up, which hardened her tone a little; and with the promptitude to misapprehend feelings that lovers are prone to, Ferrars read more in the words than they were intended to convey.

"I do not think anyone concerned can have had the ungenerous desire to look on anything done in that light."

"Nothing was meant in that way, I know, but I can't help reading it so."

"I am very sorry. I did not wish you to know I had played any part in recent events, lest you should—by a most natural impulse—do me the wrong of thinking that I had even the least flavour in my mind of a desire to triumph over you. If I had been your brother I could not have done what I did with a purer or simpler motive. But I had

the feeling that, because of some things in the past, it might seem obtrusive."

"Mr. Ferrars, I must be clumsy and stupid in some way. You are misunderstanding me somehow. I merely meant to thank you humbly for what you did in my behalf. The very fact that you did it in simple brotherly kindness only makes your action the more generous. I don't want to talk of it more than can be helped, but I should have been ashamed of myself if I had not frankly thanked you. Of course you would know I was grateful, but it would have been mean to have said nothing."

"It is very good of you to say that, and now by all means let us put the matter aside. But I wish you had been staying longer here. Oatfield is a pleasant house, but I have a boundless faith in the virtues of Marian's companionship, and I would rather you had that than anything else just now."

"I am looking forward to coming here again when the Margreaves return to town."

"I am afraid that will not be till after Christmas."

There was a pause in the conversation at

this point. No conversations are so apt to be halting as those in which floods of thoughts have to be pent up on one side or the other. Ferrars found he could only break the silence by speaking seriously.

"There is one thing I must say before you go. I shrunk so much from seeming importunate that I should rather not have asked you to remember this just yet; but to guard against any possibility of mistake in the matter in your mind, you will understand, of course, that as long as you are free I can never give up—my old purpose—about you. I don't want ——" he was going on with some phrase that should have saved her from the necessity of making any reply, but some feelings had been pent up in Terra's breast too, and she cried:

"Oh, George! George! how can you ever forgive me?"

A sort of bewildered sense that he had heard the words before came over Ferrars as she spoke; but he was not in the mood to analyse psychic phenomena at the moment. He was kneeling by her side in an instant, all cautious weighing of words forgotten,

broken down by the flood that had burst its barriers.

"Forgive you, Terra! my only love! How can there be any place for such a thought in my heart about you? You didn't think, did you, that I could have changed an atom? I might have had to repress all outward sign of my love for you under some conditions, but nothing could have made me think of you differently from the way I do. And if you lift the seal from my lips, of course the expression of my love for you must come forth in a torrent. But even now I do not know whether you have really lifted the seal."

At all events she did not oppose his caresses.

"What more would you have me say?" she asked.

"Only that if I ask Lady Margreave to let me come down to Oatfield you will not be displeased."

Later on in the conversation, which took a good deal for granted, Terra spoke of her former "pride" again as something that had been pretty effectually subdued now, so

it hardly mattered what the Margreaves would think of her when they should learn what had transpired.

"But it matters everything," Ferrars answered. "It matters above all things that you should be protected from any criticism that may annoy you. And besides, I really never hoped to get free speech with you—not to speak of an understanding so complete as this—so soon. The whole thing can remain an absolute secret between us, with Marian alone excepted, of course. I was wrong to suggest coming down to Oatfield. Let that wait."

Mrs. Malcolm came in while they were talking. Ferrars put her in possession of the facts in a delicate way.

"I have heard from Terra of your sudden plans," he said; "but she has promised to come back here as soon as that can be managed, and then I hope something may be settled that will keep us all together permanently. Of course, meanwhile, nobody will be in this understanding but us three."

Mrs. Malcolm went up and kissed her.

"I am so glad, dear Terra."

"You see," said Terra, in a tone of mockery, not without a certain bitterness, "if the Margreaves were told at once, that might be pleasanter for your brother, but it would perhaps involve a little wound to my vanity. Naturally, it is only right, considering how meritorious a person I am in all respects, and such a blessing as I have been to my friends, that anybody's feelings should be sacrificed rather than mine."

"Dearest," said Mrs. Malcolm, "don't you see that we who love you have a sense of luxury in making little sacrifices for your sake?"

"Perhaps," said Terra; "I am indeed beginning to learn the lesson, and to realize that the principle may cut both ways."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FUTURE VISIBLE.

The moment Mrs. Malcolm saw Edith, on her arrival at Compton Wood, she noticed that some subtle change had come over her. The gloomy pensiveness that had settled upon her for the day or two immediately following the recent events at Richmond had given way to a return of something more like her old bright vivacity; but with all this she was evidently under the dominion of some exalted feeling which gave a peculiar radiance to her eyes, and a dreamy sweetness to her expression when her face was in repose, different in some way from the varied and manifold charms it had always worn. Her colour was heightened, but more concentrated than formerly.

"Has anything happened to you?" Mrs.

Malcolm asked. "You have a look that I do not understand."

"Quantities of things have happened, dear. I have so much to tell you that I do not know where to begin. I have been living in two worlds since I have been back here; but that can't go on always, and I must choose between one and the other."

"But first, how have you been as to health?"

"A great impostor, I am afraid; but no one except yourself will ever understand rightly about that, and I have not attempted to explain. First of all, you see, I have been puzzling the doctors again. A new light of science was brought to bear upon me before I came down here, after we parted—a medical friend of Colonel Danby's, that he swears by. This man was away abroad when I was first examined, but came back just afterwards, and Colonel Danby had arranged for him to see me before we left town. He stethoscoped and sounded me in every sort of way, and had the satisfaction at last of declaring all the other doctors to have been entirely in the wrong. He quite reassured

poor Colonel Danby, and said there was nothing in the nature of disease about me. One lung was abnormally small, that was all. They were both quite healthy. All the doctors were right, and all wrong, of course, but they had not the clue to the mystery. At all events, it made my plans all the more easy of fulfilment, and there seemed no desperate hurry about anything, so I was the less opposed in regard to coming back here for a time than I should have been if I had been thought in imminent peril."

The conversation was taking place in Edith's own room, whither she had carried off Mrs. Malcolm on her arrival, after interviews of politeness with Mr. Kinseyle and Miss Barkley. The window, which commanded a wide prospect over level country, was fitted up as the boudoir department of the room, and here the two ladies were settled in comfortable chairs with a small table between them.

"It's a humble imitation of your bow-window at Richmond, you see," Edith had said when they first came in.

"It is very nice, but——" then Mrs.

Malcolm had asked if anything had happened, and their more serious talk had begun.

"But tell me at once," Mrs. Malcolm said, in answer to Edith's somewhat equivocal statement, "how you really are as to health. Do you know anything that goes against the last report?"

"Dear Marian, Mr. Marston's achievement was quite successful. The last doctor was right at the time, but it does not follow he will always remain right. There are queer complications to be considered about so eccentric a person as myself."

Already, while she was speaking, Mrs. Malcolm noticed her glance wander about the room once or twice, and now she was looking out over the country as if something had attracted her attention there.

"Are you *seeing* anything, Edith?"

"I am always seeing now," Edith replied. "It is perfectly wonderful how populous the world is, and not merely with the shapes and shades of people, but with spectral buildings and trees that have existed in reality some time ago. There used to be an old Roman

encampment on the very site of this house, and I can see it dimly all round us now, with the soldiers and horses going and coming. I have sat here for hours and watched them. This window is like a box at a theatre for me, and this house swarms with animated shadows—if you understand—not the spirits of the people who have lived here, but the impressions they have left behind them in this teeming picture-gallery that the eyes of the flesh do not see."

"And how has it been at Kinseyle Court?"

"At Kinseyle Court it has been glorious. I can get out of myself—out of this bodily self altogether there, and pass into perfect union with——our Guardian. Day after day, if you understand, I have put myself to sleep in the old green chair, and then I have rushed into union with what we used to call the Spirit Queen, and have looked back upon my every-day self, considering what to do with it, and very much tempted sometimes, I can tell you, to let it alone altogether, and be bothered about it no more."

"Oh, Edith!"

"You remember all that Mr. Marston used to explain about our Guardian, Marian. She is our Guardian Spirit in one sense, but then she is not separate or different from us, as one living person would be separate or different from another. I do not want you to look upon this"—touching herself lightly with the tips of her fingers—"as the spirit you have been reverencing; and *this* me, this phase of me, is not of course anything of the kind; but when I rejoin her there, she and I are one. She is just what Mr. Marston used to call it—my Higher Self."

"How has it all come upon you with such wonderful vividness?"

"Because of what Mr. Marston did, though he did not mean to do exactly that. Do you remember, Marian, how I said to you before we last separated, that I felt as if I was going to burst some sort of shell? Well, now the shell *is* burst, and the energy Mr. Marston put into my body, meaning to give me a new lease of physical life, has been transmuted to something better, just because I was so much more impressed by the absolute nobleness of his conduct in the whole matter than by the

pleasure of being restored to health and strength. He understands that now, and will not be disappointed if his work bears a different sort of fruit from that he meant it to bear at first"

"How do you know?" Mrs. Malcolm said; for Edith had spoken in a tone of calm confidence that seemed to imply more than a mere vague trust that things might be as she said.

"He told me so yesterday—though I don't mean that he told me in words, the same as if he had been still in this life. *You* will understand, Marian, if you think of it. When I am properly united with my true self, of course I am in a state which corresponds to the state into which our friend has also passed. Naturally I can exchange thoughts and share feelings with him, as I can also with your own dear Higher Self, Marian—don't you see?"

"You have rushed forward into such astounding developments, Edith, that I can hardly follow you, even in imagination."

"It sounds mystic and unintelligible, perhaps, but it has all come to be so perfectly

simple and straightforward to me, that I am sure you will understand it too. And yet, you know, you must not think of us as so many isolated people going about in our Higher Selves on the spirit plane of nature. There is something very curious about that. When I look at my Higher Self from the body with clairvoyant sight, of course there, you understand, is the Spirit Queen of my former visions in a definite shape, radiant and beautiful; but when I fly to her, then I am all thought and feeling, and in the most intimate relations with the thoughts and feelings of that other centre of thought and feeling we have been in the habit of calling Mr. Marston, as with others also. Whenever I appear in the future to you, I shall appear in the shape you have been used to, only much plainer and clearer, and more companionable."

"Oh, Edith, darling, what you say makes me see that you mean to go away!"

Mrs. Malcolm drew up her chair to Edith's, and put her face down upon the girl's shoulder.

Edith soothed and caressed her, reversing the relations that had generally existed

between them, in which Mrs. Malcolm had, as it were, played the part of the stronger and wiser friend.

"Dear," she said, "don't you see it must be so? Knowing all I know now, and with the consciousness so vivid as I have described to you of what the other life open to me is like, how can I possibly go on with this? If it had all been different, I might have been bound to stop. But in the natural course of things my life ought to have run out about now. It would have been with me as it was with my mother. Nobody knew she was ill till she was on the point of death. Then it was a hurried good-bye, and all the trouble was over. The *un*natural thing with me has been that if I had clung very desperately to life I might, through our friend's sacrifice, have circumvented my proper destiny."

"You may be right, Edith, and wisest, but, oh! it will be such a wrench for me."

"That's the sad trouble of it. And it will be a wrench of a different kind for others, too. Next to you, poor papa in his quiet way will feel it most."

"And your husband that was to have been."

"I'm very, very sorry to have been the cause of trouble; but the mysteries of these things are too intricate to understand fully. I only know this much, that if it had not been for Mr. Marston my marriage would have been intercepted just as certainly as it will be. If I could have foreseen everything, of course I would never have let things develop as they did. But still I know, for it has been shown to me, that in the long run the sorrow, such as it will be, that Colonel Danby will feel, will do him more good than a little transitory spell of pleasure in having me for a wife. We are not really akin in nature."

It was a hard trial to Mrs. Malcolm to answer Mr. Kinseyle's inquiries, when he sought a little private talk with her during the evening about Edith's condition, and the prospects of her marriage. Hard even to sit at dinner and fall in with the gay humour Edith endeavoured to throw into the conversation, mixed with great tenderness towards her father and poor "B.," whose mission, by

any view of the situation, was fading so rapidly into nothingness. Edith had concerned herself very anxiously for Miss Barkley's future, which she had made her father promise to provide for satisfactorily out of means which, as she pointed out, could easily be spared by her, though the precise way in which she would be able to spare them was left in some obscurity; but "B." was too sincerely distressed at the break-up of her long intimacy with her pupil to look forward with much joy to her independence, and was ready to subside into a tearful hopefulness about the impending separation on small provocation.

"She seems well," Mr. Kinseyle had said, when speaking to Mrs. Malcolm apart, "but there is something about her that alarms me. I do not know why. She seems so exalted in feeling, and yet to dwell so little on the future."

"She has an intensely spiritual nature," Mrs. Malcolm answered vaguely; "and then again she feels, no doubt, that she is bidding a sort of farewell to you and her old home."

"She makes me think of her mother continually. I don't know why, though even her dear mother was not her equal in beauty and intelligence; but her mother was very loving, and Edith has seemed so gentle and sweet of late. She has always been that in one way—a dear, faultless girl—but there is something about her now that seems to bring back her mother to my fancy, and I never properly valued *her*, I think, till I lost her."

"I suppose it is inevitable that you should lose her, too, in another way, and if it is best for her happiness——"

"Of course, I would not be selfish about it; but I wonder will she be properly valued and cherished."

"Mr. Kinseyle, I am sure she will be." Mrs. Malcolm could hardly control herself, but there was enough in the mere notion that a serious change was impending to justify the solemnity of her tone, and Mr. Kinseyle took the assurance in its simplest signification.

Edith and she drove over to Kinseyle Court the following afternoon in the little pony-phaeton. Mrs. Malcolm had been

telling her about the prospect of a happy settlement at last for Terra and George, and Edith gaily applauded herself for having brought that result about.

"I haven't been altogether useless to my fellow creatures after all, Marian, have I?" she said. "How curiously all our destinies have been linked up together, haven't they? I should have been nothing without you to set my feet upon the right path, and without me your brother would never have got his happiness, and Terra's life would have been wrecked."

"But I didn't know where the path was leading you to, Edith. Forgive me for being so selfish, dear, but my heart is bleeding at every pore, and I can't help it."

"My own Marian, I am going to see if I can't do something to heal it this afternoon."

"Edith, tell me one thing. The strain is greater than I can bear. When—when is it to be?"

"When am I going to say good-bye?" Edith was driving the little carriage, and her hands were occupied, but she nestled her head for a moment up against Mrs. Malcolm's

shoulder, and said with a bright smile, "Not till you give me leave to go, dear. There, you have my fate in your own keeping."

She would not make her meaning more explicit, but she assured Mrs. Malcolm that, at all events, there was to be no sudden wrench that day. "Don't be apprehensive, dear. Everything shall be made as easy for you as possible."

"I can't treat the whole business as a tragedy," she went on shortly afterwards. "I know you are in pain, but, indeed, I do see so clearly beyond. Marian, if I led a horrid, stupid, conventional life, I might drift away from you a thousand times further than I shall drift as things will be. We are in perfect sympathy and union as it is, and you only have to wait a bit and come too. But I am sure you will be happier about it all presently."

They left the phaeton in the care of Mr. Squires at the lodge, and walked up the avenue to the quiet old house.

"Don't you feel the magnetism, Marian?" Edith asked, as they shut themselves into the library.

"My senses are all confused, and my sight is blurred."

"You will be better directly. Wait a bit. I am getting to be something of a mesmerist in my turn. Sit you down here." And she put Mrs. Malcolm into the corner of a couch in the library commanding a view of the door leading into "the Countess's Study."

"We used to fill the place with such influences," Edith said, "in the Countess's day, that it is still a sort of psychic sponge, and we can squeeze out all sorts of effects from the atmosphere."

She kissed Mrs. Malcolm on the forehead, and stroked her head and brooded over her for a little, and asked her if she did not feel better.

"You make me adore you, Edith, as if you were my Guardian herself; but I don't know that that makes me feel more reconciled."

"Well, stop where you are. I am not going out of your sight; but I am going to have a nap in my own green chair over there."

She went into the inner room, and sat down in the chair she pointed out.

"You'll promise me to wait patiently for a little while, won't you? and I will promise you to bring myself round again presently."

"Yes, dear."

Edith gave a sigh of relief as she settled low down in the corner of her chair, with her head propped on a pillow, and sank into a motionless stupor. But as Mrs. Malcolm gazed upon her, she seemed to see her figure gradually surrounded by a sort of mist, and through her strained emotions came back upon her heart the rapt feeling of ecstasy with which the presence of her Guardian Spirit had always been greeted. By degrees the mist intensified and shone as if with a white brilliancy of its own, and interposed itself before the form of the sleeping girl. Then, as Mrs. Malcolm leaned forward in eager excitement, the shape settled into that of the radiant figure she was familiar with in snowy drapery, but far more vivid and distinct than she had ever seen it before, with bare arms and feet, and surmounted with the old diaphanous veil, through which—so faint and thin it was—she seemed already to divine the well-known and well-loved features. The

spirit-figure came forward and stood for a moment in the doorway, and then, lifting one hand to her head, drew away the cloudy gauze from her face.

"Edith, it is yourself, my darling!" Mrs. Malcolm cried.

The spirit-figure came forward with a beautiful exalted smile upon her face. Mrs. Malcolm's clairvoyant faculties were now in full play; and in the way she knew by old experience, though no sound that would have been audible to coarser ears was made, she heard the words spoken to her.

"Dear Marian, yes, it is I, and I shall often come to you—almost whenever you like. You have been so good in doing always all I have asked you, when I could only make myself half known to you. We will have many a talk together now, face to face and much more openly. You have come to know me piecemeal up to now; but it will be my real self you will commune with in future."

"Forgive me, my guardian angel, if I have fought against your will in anything."

"You have got so fond of the casket," the

spirit said, with a wave of her hand towards the inner room, and with no reproachful tone, but rather, as it were, in gentle excuse for the weakness Mrs. Malcolm confessed. She stood quite close up to the couch now, and Mrs. Malcolm was leaning back with her head almost enveloped in the snowy drapery. Mrs. Malcolm followed the direction of her hand, and saw the bodily form lying motionless in the chair.

"It is a lovely casket."

"But it cannot hold all of me that craves your love. And now you shall sleep too for a while, and we will be even more together than we are at this moment."

In losing consciousness of her physical surroundings, as Mrs. Malcolm leaned back, her eyes fixed and her whole soul concentrated on the face of the beautiful spirit, she never for a moment seemed to lose consciousness of *her;* but by degrees—or rather without noticing the degrees, and yet not suddenly—she seemed to float into a state of beatitude in which she and the spirit were together in an intimacy which blended them almost into one being. Side by side with her, in a union

closer than the closest earthly embrace, and with thrilling emotions of ecstasy—keener and more intense even than the strong love of her waking consciousness—she seemed to pass away into regions of infinite distance and splendour, and, without putting her ideas into the slow concatenation of words and phrases, to drink in a sense of the larger existence to which she was thus introduced, and of the relative insignificance of the faintly remembered joys and pain of the physical state of life so left behind. As her thoughts turned to one or the other of the stronger interests of her earthly life, these seemed vitalized before her. As she thought of her brother, he was there beside her, and seemed to be welcoming her to the new realm she was exploring, as if he already belonged to it—and as she thought of Marston, she suddenly found herself face to face with him, recognising him instantly as the friend she had known so long, but as a glorified presentation of himself, with all the old weariness of existence and the stains of sorrow washed out of his nature, and a look of supreme happiness in his wide-open eyes—a glowing conscious-

ness of Edith's presence which, filling his whole existence with rapture as it did, yet left him able none the less joyously to greet her and share with her the sense of love for the object of their double devotion. There was no perception of hurry in the progress of all this; on the contrary, a sense of long, calm durability in their delight, and the panorama of a new nature round them was not neglected, but surveyed as it were by all three with the feeling that they were now in final security as regards their companionship, and in a position to take interest in minor things at leisure. Some impression, too, of her earlier life on earth came back to her, and the corresponding vibrations of emotion were taken up in their turn—always in tune, as it were, to the dominant note of her new condition—her close identity with Edith. She did not measure time as it passed; but the pain that had gnawed at her heart all that morning died quite away, as though it had never been felt, and her soul was refreshed, so that the recollection that there had once been a kind of sadness somehow associated in her emotions with Edith was almost difficult

to recover, when the spirit which was Edith, and yet seemed almost a part of herself, came at last to be emphasised again before her sight as a being external to herself. Not losing sight of her, but gradually taking in as well the impressions of the scene then around her, she was aware again of the library at Kinseyle Court.

"You are not leaving me?" she said.

"Of course not, dear. We shall be always together, really, only there is something to be done, don't you remember, for the others. It is only turning your attention away from me for a little while."

She was awake again now, and understood the situation; but the spirit was still beside her, and the rapture of her influence in her heart, cleansed for the time of its distress and trembling apprehensions.

"I had forgotten the burden of life, but it will not be so hard to bear now."

"You will know now I am ready waiting for you, will you not?—even though sometimes for awhile you do not see me."

"Where have we been, Edith? It has seemed to me a great way off, and that we

have been away a very long time—a gloriously long time. I am altogether refreshed, as if by a sound sleep after fatigue."

"You must compare notes, and ask *her* when she wakes," and the spirit again pointed to the inner room, where Mrs. Malcolm's glance, following her gesture, saw the sleeping, bodily Edith as before.

"*Her!* But Edith, dearest, *this* is you?"

"And so without unfaithfulness in love to me you will come to be a little less anxious about the casket, will you not?"

"To do what you tell me is my supreme joy and desire."

The spirit bent over her, and pulsations of intense emotion seemed to sweep across her soul in waves, and then, still smiling and waving her hand in a light farewell, as if to imply that the good-bye was only for a little while, she passed back up the steps and through the doorway, and enveloped in the white folds of her drapery the sleeping figure in the chair. Mrs. Malcolm had the feeling in her ears that the words came back to her, "Stay where you are a moment longer," and then, passing beyond Edith's form, the spirit

seemed to grow indistinct, and float upward, and away, and disappear.

Almost directly Edith stirred in her chair, then sat up and swept her hand across her eyes, and then looked across to Mrs. Malcolm and smiled.

"Edith, darling, may I come to you now?" She got up as she spoke, and came across to the door. Edith held out her hands with a bright look of welcome. Mrs. Malcolm came up and knelt by her side, and put her arms round her without speaking.

"Do you remember everything?" Edith asked.

"Every moment—every look. What an ineffable wonder it all is!"

"I'm better worth your friendship that way, am I not, Marian?"

"My dearest, where your soul is centred for the time, that is the phase of you to which my love clings. As you are now, you wear in my eyes the glory of your higher state, and as you are then, you are filled with your own sweet loveliness."

"And you are more reconciled to the situation now, are you not, Marian?"

"I have been looking at it so long from the other side, dear, I have lost for a little the sense of pain it must give from this side. But I am reconciled, dearest, in one way—I am resigned, and accept what must be, submissively."

"The trial for you is that you will seem separated from me, no matter what I try to do to soften the impression, while I shall never be conscious of being separated from you at all. But in real truth, even from your point of view, I shall be more with you than if I had been living in the flesh, away from you most of my time, in all parts of Europe. People talk very stupidly about the separations of death. The separations of life are often quite as complete, and much more so than the other separation may be."

"But tell me, Edith, dearest, are you conscious, as you sit there, of your power to enter on the other life as you please? What was it that floated away and left you just now?"

"I know I can get back into union with that higher part of me when I choose now, but it is she who knows all the rest. You

see, this is the unnatural state for me to be in now. I ought to be gone, and I am kept in bodily life by a sort of effort. The machinery is going with an energy that does not properly belong to it. As soon as all restraint is thrown off it will run down with a whirr, like a watch with the spring broken."

Even now Mrs. Malcolm could not repress a little shudder at the idea.

Edith laughed.

"I tell you," she said, "I feel elated about it myself, and I want you to share my good spirits. Of course, poor dear, you have got to bear all the disagreeables, and, worst of all, to help poor papa to bear them. You will judge how far it will be possible to get him to realize all you have been through to-day. I think he will understand it in a great measure, but I shall never be able to visit and console him, because he would not see me in that state as you can. But I am going to say some things to him beforehand that will prepare him to believe you."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HIGHER SELF.

She found an opportunity of doing so that evening, when Mr. Kinseyle asked some question as to how they had spent the day.

"Over at the Court a good deal, papa dear. I have been indoctrinating Mrs. Malcolm with my love of the place."

"You ought to get your husband to rent it, or borrow it, from the Miltenhams," suggested Mr. Kinseyle, "and make part of it habitable. Then you might stay there sometimes."

"Poor old Court! I don't think I should welcome the idea of having it turned into a modern dwelling, where common-place people would congregate to have breakfast and dinner. It would take all the poetry out of the place if it were used for anything but to dream in and see visions."

"I hope you have been dreaming pleasant dreams there, and seeing visions of a bright life before you, my dear. Where have you been laying the scenes of them?"

"Ah, so you want to consult the oracle after all, papa, and find out what is going to happen? You would come to have faith in my prophetic sight if my visions should come true, wouldn't you, papa?"

"I'm afraid my imagination is not poetic enough for the sort of faith you mean. I would not shut out belief in any demonstrated truth, however new or strange, but poetic imaginings, however vivid, do not easily link themselves on to the kind of tests that constitute a demonstration."

"That's true; and I, with plenty of fancies of my own, I am not practical enough to bring them to a focus for you. Mrs. Malcolm would be better able to do that. I think, papa dear, I must put you in her hands, and make you her pupil. I am sure she could explain things far better than I can."

"Perhaps Mrs. Malcolm might think herself better employed in other ways than in

wasting her explanations on so prosaic a person as I."

"Well, I can't appoint the time now; while she and I are together here I want the whole of her time to myself. But do you remember this, papa dear, whenever you have an opportunity of discussing my fancies in a really serious and searching way with Mrs. Malcolm, that she will be talking my sentiments, you know, infinitely better expressed. That's really a happy idea."

Keeping to the bright tone of gaiety in which she had already been speaking, or rather, assuming a solemnity of manner that belonged to one of the varieties of her old familiar gaiety, which would sometimes express itself in a half jesting stateliness, she added slowly, and with one hand extended—

"I lay it as an injunction upon you, papa as a parting injunction mind, which has all the immense importance of a serious occasion, to believe all that Mrs. Malcolm will tell you about me, whenever you two may be consoling yourselves for my absence by talking of me. Whatever she says to you I confirm, recollect."

Mr. Kinseyle listened with a kindly smile, treating the words as so much airy trifling, but ready to fall in with them, however, to please his daughter.

"To hear is to obey."

"I will improve on that declaration, loyal and satisfactory as far as it goes. To remember will be to obey. But mind you, do not forget. What is the date, and the hour, and the minute?"

Insisting on the realization of her whim, the exact moment was ascertained.

"Put it down, papa. Where is your pocket-book?"

"A capital memory is one of my few good points, dear," said Mr. Kinseyle, affecting laziness good-humouredly.

"And a perfect craze for having my own way *exactly*, one of my numerous bad ones," replied Edith. "Produce the book, papa, this *moment*."

The book was produced, and coming round to the back of the sofa on which he was sitting, looking over his shoulder with her arms round his neck, he entered the memorandum at her dictation. "To remember

that I have made a promise to Edith on the 17th day of September, at forty-nine minutes past seven o'clock."

"That will do," said Edith contentedly, giving him a kiss; while Mrs. Malcolm, to conceal emotions she could not easily control, got up from her seat, and went over to the window, as if to look out at the darkening landscape.

"I'm a perfect angel for good temper," remarked Edith, keeping up the tone of the situation, "when people do precisely what I tell them."

Mr. Kinseyle went away to write shortly after this, and Mrs. Malcolm sat beside Edith, holding her in a clinging embrace, and giving way to the feelings that had been pent up during the little scene that had just passed. "Forgive me, Edith darling; I am not rebellious, but I can't help crying. It is so sweet to have you with me in this way."

"It is sweeter still in the other way."

"Whichever form is present, that is the best."

They made no pretence of passing the evening with any sort of occupation, music,

or reading. They simply sat side by side alone together, not talking much about the impending change, or much about anything indeed, though every now and then Edith's clairvoyant senses, which were operating with great intensity, led her to speak, not only of appearances she noticed round about them, but of the scenes in which Terra and George Ferrars—he in London, and she in the North—found themselves at that moment, and even of stray bits of conversation in which they were concerned. At last they parted for the night, and Mrs. Malcolm would have liked to ask some question about what they should be doing the following day, but dared not.

It was long before she slept; and her bosom ached with sadness as the hours crept by slowly. She could hardly refrain from getting up and going to Edith's room to sit by the girl's bedside, if she should be sleeping, or to watch with her if she should be awake. But her restless grief calmed down at last, and in the sleep which came upon her, though she hardly seemed to lose consciousness of her room or the impending change, her pain all passed away, and the well-known thrill of

spiritual rapture swept over her weary senses. She *felt* the glorified spirit of Edith beside her, even as she lay in a state of semi-slumber, consciously refraining from the least movement, lest the conditions of that enchanting experience should be disturbed. She was summoned to wake presently, however, by the voice which spoke to her inner ear:

"Look up, Marian. I am not going to slip away from you."

By virtue of a radiance which appealed to the clairvoyant sense she was as plainly visible as she had been in the afternoon, and even the room, which had been nearly dark before, was faintly illuminated for Mrs. Malcolm's perceptions, through some mysterious sympathy of her inner and outer faculties.

"Dearest, I was afraid to move, lest I should have been only dreaming."

"I could have taken your inner self away with me without waking you up, and we will go away together presently, if you like; but I was obliged to talk to you a little this way first, because I made you a promise."

"Yes."

"But first you do not want to go into the other room now, and sit by the bedside, do you?"

"Of course not while you are here."

"Just so—and Marian, dear, I am tired of the other room, and do not want to go back there either. You will not make me, will you?"

"I see your meaning, but I am too much enraptured with you near me in this way, to feel any sadness in it. Surely I am ready to bear my part of the inevitable pain, and willingly, for your sake."

"You will feel while I am talking to you in this way that there is no question of my abandoning you—nor of any real separation. I am not asking your leave to go away from you, but merely to keep as I am now; and, dearest, I tell you we will often and often be together."

"Let it be as you will, dearest. I give my consent."

"That's right, my own Marian." The radiant figure seemed to grow brighter and more substantial even than before, and bending over Mrs. Malcolm, embraced and kissed

her. "That's so much better so," she said; "and now, do you see any change in me?"

"I think you look a little brighter and lovelier even than ever."

"And that is the change you have been so frightened of."

"Is it finally accomplished, then?"

"That's over, dear, and the machinery I want no more has run down. Come away with me for awhile, and share my freedom and delight."

"Oh, darling! can't you take me at once and for always to be like yourself?"

"Not just yet; but that will come; and promise me meanwhile, you will not be distrustful and impatient."

"You will forgive mere weakness, dear, won't you?"

"You cannot have a thought that will need forgiveness from me, Marian; but it will be easiest for me to be with you visibly when you are most trustful and patient."

It seemed to Mrs. Malcolm, when the morning came, that she had passed through years of time, and that the bodily Edith was a beautiful memory rather than a fact of

yesterday. The real Edith came back with her from their spiritual wanderings together, and sat by her bedside and talked with her when she woke; and they waited together till they felt a foreshadowing of the early alarm which was certain to stir the house but too soon.

"And now you may bid me good-bye," said Edith, "for a little while. It is hardly good-bye from me at all, for I shall scarcely be conscious of missing any part of you from the Higher Self that will be always with me. I shall be none the less with you because I shall be also with the one other person who has earned so thoroughly the right to blend his existence with mine."

"Happy Sydney!" said Mrs. Malcolm. "Give him my love."

THE END.

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